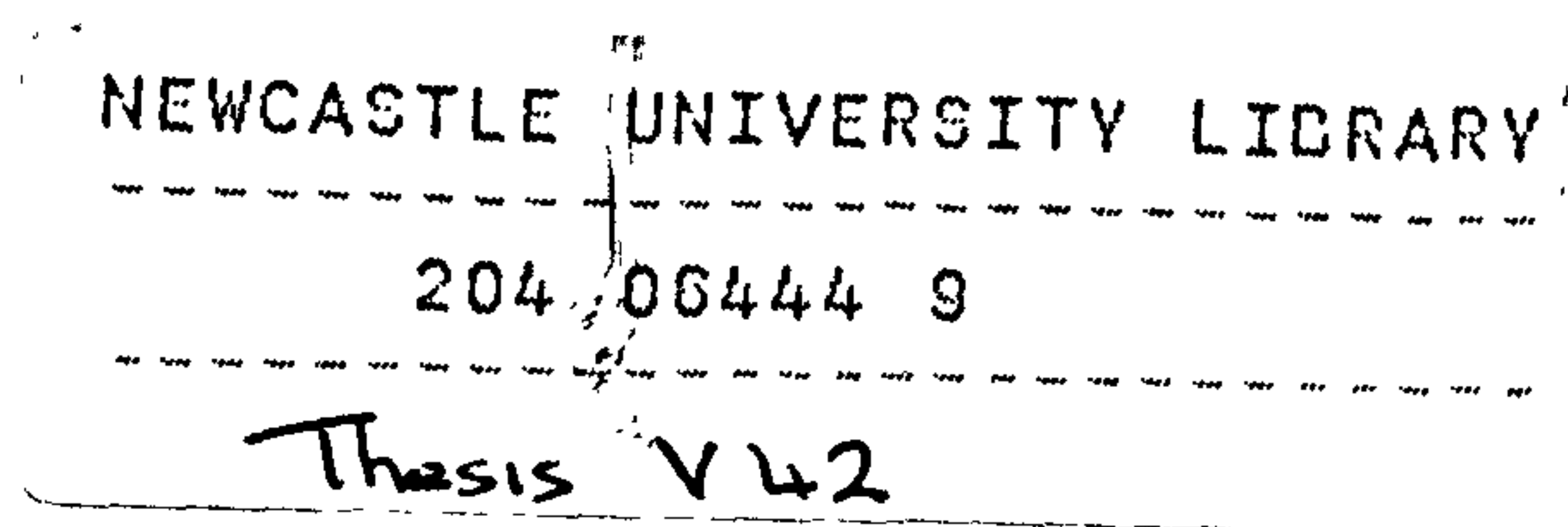


**What is your value?**

**A qualitative study into the development of  
capital in amateur and professional boxing**

**JOHN ANTHONY FULTON**



2005  
E.D.A.





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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne for the degree of Doctor of Education.



## Acknowledgments

*To the memory of my mother and father*

*Helen Callander Fulton*

*and*

*John Francis Fulton*

### Special thanks to:

- My academic supervisor Professor James Tooley for excellent guidance.
- Shelagh Keogh, whose help and support went well beyond the call of duty.
- Professor Melanie Jasper and Christine Keogh who commented on an earlier draft of the work.
- David Ashdown, Clive Gibson and Graeme Littlewood for all their help and encouragement.
- All the boxers who helped me and freely gave of their time during this research process.

### *What is your value?*

#### *A qualitative study into the development of capital in amateur and professional boxing*

##### **Abstract**

This study is an investigation into ways in which participating in and learning within the context of sport, and amateur and professional boxing in particular, impacts on the lives of the participants. More specifically, the aim of this study is to explore ways in which body capital can lead to the development of other types of capital. The study focused on the experience of professional and amateur boxers. 18 people involved in boxing were interviewed and these interviews were combined with approximately 1000 hours of participant observation in boxing settings.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and detailed field notes recorded the observations. The data was analysed and categories and themes emerged from this data analysis. The categories were organised in a structure, process and outcome framework. The categories around structure were the dispositions and attitudes of the informants and their class position, process was around the mechanics of learning the particular skills of boxing, and the outcomes was both the boxing match and more generally ways in which participation in the sport could affect the broader aspects of the participants' lives. The theoretical framework employed was drawn from Bourdieu's theories and in particular his concepts habitus, field and capital. The consideration of the findings against this unit of analysis facilitated the interpretation of the findings.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis and consideration of the findings are: although there is an increase in middle class involvement, which is the growth of the so-called white collar boxing, for those working class participants, participation in boxing reinforces the individual's class position. An example of this was the finding that an acceptance of being exploited is almost a pre-requisite for professional boxing.

Boxing is a skilled and challenging sport leading to the development of clear and focused skills, both physical and psychological. On one level many of these skills cannot be transferred from the boxing or fight situation. However there is much in boxing which is transferable and can enhance the individual's life: the capacity for commitment and control of emotions are some examples of this. Despite these positive features the skills did not seem to transfer to other areas and did not lead to participation in formal educational opportunities.

Nevertheless participation in boxing did add to the social capital of the individuals which led to the development of a series of networks and contacts which could clearly add to and enhance the lives of the boxers.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

I am interested in the process of learning and in particular the ways in which people learn. People can and do learn in a variety of ways both in the formal educational settings and less formal activities such as sport and social activities. Earlier, I carried out a small scale research study, by means of a questionnaire. I examined the particular approaches which people take to their fitness activities and it seemed that people did not use their knowledge in approaching their fitness regimes and, consequently, these were not as effective as they perhaps could have been. The study was small scale and the results were not generalisable, but it did give me much food for thought and certainly gave me an educational area which I wished to explore further. Once I had established an idea or an area for research the next issue lay in identifying a specific area and the appropriate methodology. To structure my ideas I selected a conceptual framework identified by Maxwell (1996) who presents a particular model for qualitative research design that is a useful framework on which to outline the key principles for methodology for this study.

Maxwell (1996) calls his model an interactive research design and he introduces five components: purposes, conceptual context, research questions and validity. He presents this model diagrammatically to show the relationship between the categories. I have adapted this model as a focus for this study.

The purpose and conceptual context lead to research questions, which determined methodology and, in turn, of validity. As illustrated in figure 1:

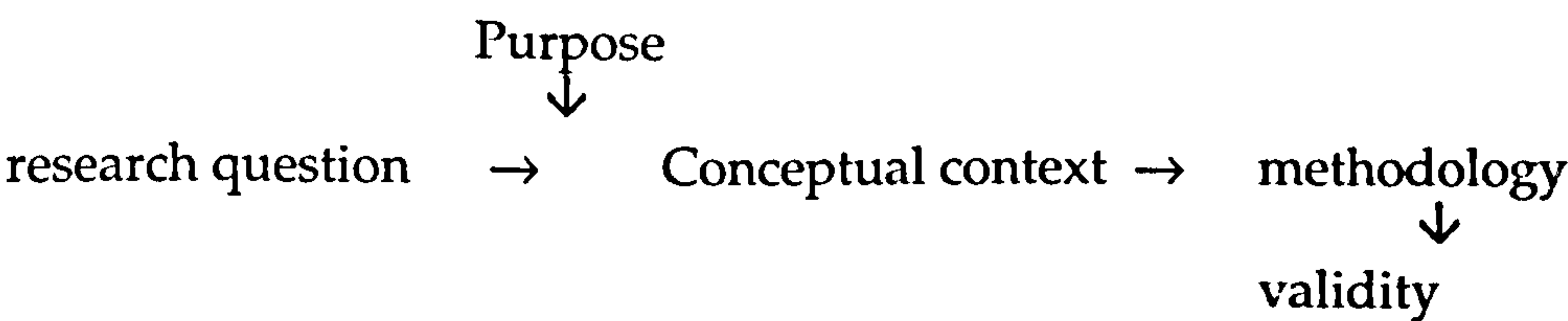


Figure 1 Maxwell’s Framework



I will outline my position and interest and then develop them in the context of this study using Maxwell's framework.

## Purpose

I am employed as a full time academic responsible for continuing professional development programmes for health professionals, mainly of nurses. One of my particular interests is the concept of life long learning. It is a term that is increasingly used in both the educational and health rhetoric on learning, particularly in the post 16 context. At one level the meaning is very obvious and transparent: that is, rather than formal education ending when the person leaves school or higher education, learning is a life long process with the individual continually developing both their skills and in the process developing themselves. This is entirely laudable, but how could this come about? The ways in which different sectors could be engaged in learning were questions which I wished to explore in more detail. In the context of my professional activities, life long learning was also a phrase which I found was used so often as to become something of a catch phrase.

Associated with this train of thought was my concern with the notion of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, the idea being all engagement in learning activity is potentially meaningful and can be transferred across situations. More specifically the knowledge and skills could be encapsulated and identified, and then mapped against a programme of study. The reality is often quite different in practice: accreditation is generally only for certificated courses and not for uncertificated learning.

I teach "Evidenced Based Healthcare" and it was from this came the third area which gave me much material for reflection, the seemingly difficult concept (for some) of "odds ratio": that is what are the chances of this treatment being effective? (Similar to, in racing terms: "what are the odds of the horse winning this race?") I was required to teach this particular concept in the context of evidenced based practice. It was a concept, which the students found difficult to grasp and yet people with little formal education grasp without difficulty in bookmakers' shops up and down the country.

There was, I concluded, much learning, which takes place in everyday life, yet based on my experience with the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning, few people came forward to acknowledge any links with formal study. It also seemed that the whole notion of life long learning needed a conceptual framework, otherwise it could become a series of unrelated activities, certainly for the individual engaging in the activity.

Around this time, I developed an interest in boxing having no previous experience of this activity. I was engaged in boxing training as a means of keeping fit. I gained a strong appreciation of the skills involved in boxing and



how gifted and talented boxers are, despite the many stereotypes. Looking at the area I also wondered if any of these skills were transferable, not in the obvious sense (of hitting others) but perhaps more subtly. There were a number of young men who were educationally underachieving. As boxing is a predominantly male activity, I thought some insights could be gained from an exploration of boxing.

## Conceptual Context

At the time of the genesis and the development of this study I was interested in life long learning and boxing. In the early stages I looked upon these as two quite distinct areas. I was aware of the need for a conceptual framework on which to develop the issue of life long learning. The theories of the French sociologist Bourdieu are often used to provide some conceptualisation of life-long learning and the ways in which it can enhance people's lives (Bloomer, 1996). My initial particular interest was in the concept of capital, a concept while not unique to Bourdieu was one of the cornerstones of this theory. Capital is a term used in economics and means some commodity, which can be used in exchange for goods, product or activity which the other person desires. Money is an obvious example, but other objects can also be used. Bourdieu has taken this notion of capital and used it in the sense of human attributes, which are acquired usually through the individual's birth position and which are added to and enhanced throughout their life, and can act in much the same way as money to improve the lot of an individual. In the context of life long learning the basic premise is that learning will develop the "capital" of the individual, which will thereby increase their life opportunities. The theoretical basis of this research study and Bourdieu's theories are considered in Chapter Three.

Bourdieu uses terminology in a focused and specific manner and, before identifying the research questions, his key concepts that will be utilised in this work will be outlined. Bourdieu's writings are not always immediately accessible, partly because most are in translation and also because Bourdieu argued that as he was writing about society and experiences which many can relate, he did not always write in an accessible way, his aim being: the reader has to work at considering his theories and their meaning (Webb et al, 2002). I found I had to work to identify the particular meaning of much of Bourdieu's theorising and because of this I have used both primary and secondary sources on Bourdieu.

My second area of investigation was that of boxing. Much of the literature on boxing is predominantly popularist and biographical. However, Sugden (1987) and Wacquant<sup>1</sup> (1992) have undertaken academic studies in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the theoretical framework was selected before the literature was examined in any great detail. I subsequently discovered that one of the major theorists, Wacquant, wrote extensively and exclusively in the tradition of Bourdieu.



Wacquant in particular has undertaken an excellent academic study on boxing, explicitly in the tradition of Bourdieu. Through his study on boxing he developed the concept of body capital as the way in which the physical development of the individual can be used by others as a means of making money or, more specifically how physical prowess could be exploited by others. This lead me to think of how this physical development could link with development of other areas of the individual's life or put in another way, how it could enhance their cultural capital.

## Key Concepts

As Bourdieu's thinking was influential to the development of this study it is logical to outline some key concepts which guided and directed the focus and analysis of the research. Bourdieu is concerned with the relationship between the objective structures of society and the subjective experience of the individual (Bourdieu, 1979). This was not seen by Bourdieu as in any way dualistic, but as integrated and the ways in which the individual would relate to and conceptualize his or her world. As a means of developing and expressing his ideas, Bourdieu developed the key concepts of the field, capital and habitus.

*Habitus* can be defined as the schema or ways of viewing and interacting with the world which comes from being a member of a particular social class or group of people. Habitus is partly unconscious (Webb et al, 2002), and through the habitus we are disposed to certain behaviours. It is a clear reflection of our position in society; it follows that working class and middle class people have varying habitus.

*Field* refers to the environment in which individuals function. Nash (2003) refers to field as a set of relations functioning within a certain structure. Field can be as broad as society as a whole or as narrow as a particular discipline or activity:

A cultural field can be defined as: a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities (Webb et al, 2002: 21 - 22).

People engaging in a particular field do so through their habitus. Bourdieu's concept of society is much closer to Weber (1902) than to Marx (1867) and Bourdieu sees society as a series of groups or cultures where the dominant are ruling and controlling the resources. In particular, the dominant culture determines ways in which knowledge is reproduced and the ways in which certain groups can be excluded from accessing knowledge (Bourdieu, 1978).



For Bourdieu, everyday practice can be a means of determining structures and ensuring their reproduction for the benefit of dominant classes.

*Capital* tends to be used in conjunction with a particular type – for instance cultural capital refers to the extent which an individual has skills which can be measured against the requirements of the ruling classes. An example of this is someone who dresses and speaks poorly attending an interview for a high level job, against someone who dresses and has the manners which derive from a public school education. Another way of putting it could be ‘how much are you worth?’ in a specific situation. While there are other forms of capital, cultural capital is perhaps the underpinning principle on which society can be based (Bourdieu, 1997).

Economic capital is another type of capital, and again to continue with the metaphor of ‘how much are you worth?’, it is quite simply how much or what type of salary does your skill demand in the market. Clearly, this is very much tied in with the notion of cultural capital, and the way in which your cultural capital can determine your opportunities (Bourdieu, 1997).

Social capital is the resource which can be developed through relationships between people (Falk et Kirkpatrick, 1999), that is networks and support systems which people develop, can be linked to cultural capital. The stronger the cultural capital the stronger the networks the individual will have in society. As part of community developments attempts are made to develop links and networks among so-called disadvantaged groups.

Body capital, a concept developed by Wacquant, (1992) from his boxing study, is highly relevant to this study. It is basically how your body is developed and how much you can earn through the use of your body. Wacquant draws parallels between boxing and prostitution, but it seems that this is a very under developed area in the whole area of capital. Many people use their bodies and physical development / prowess as a means of developing capital.

This study is specifically about male boxers and their experience, therefore the masculine pronoun is used throughout when discussing the experience of boxers. There is an increasing trend in qualitative research for the researcher to write in the first person, to emphasise his or her involvement in the process of the research and the way in which the researchers experience is used and interacts with the data and the conclusions which are drawn (Webb, 1992). For this reason, the first person is used throughout rather than “the researcher” or the “author”.

This section has considered the social structure in which boxing takes place, following a line of thought illustrated particularly by Bourdieu and Wacqaunt. It would seem that the social structure is reproduced in sport.



Ideas of embodiment would also suggest that this can be a powerful means of social control, and, based on the data, it would seem that boxing is no exception. Boxing is seen as one of the “prole sports” (Wilson, 2002). However, there is an increasing middle class involvement in the sport, but the meaning for the middle class participant is very different from the working class young man. For the middle classes, it is more about enhancing a sense of masculinity, whereas the working class involvement is about the use of the body in a purposeful manner.

### **Research questions.**

On the basis of this line of thought, the following research questions were established: The central research question of this study is:

Are the skills involved in creating body capital, within the context of amateur and professional boxing, transferable to other areas?

This will be addressed through:

- An examination of the concept of “body capital” through a critique of Wacquant’s methods and findings

And the research questions:

- What are the structural issues affecting boxing?
- How does the development of the skills in boxing relate to the development of capital?
- In what ways does body capital relate to/enhance other areas in the young men’s lives?

The focus of this study is the ways in which body capital in the context of boxing interacts with other areas and develops other types of capital in the young men’s lives.

### **Methodology**

The methodology is considered in some detail in Chapter Three, as is the validity and reliability of the study. I approached the investigation with some knowledge of life long learning and little knowledge of boxing. I was aware of the growing body of literature around life long learning and was totally unaware of any literature on boxing. An investigation quickly identified that there was not a great deal on boxing and little on linkages between sport and life long learning. I was, additionally, attempting to use the theories of Bourdieu as a particular framework on which to structure the investigation. I

was not attempting to test Bourdieu's notion of habitus, capital and field, but rather wished to see the ways in which they could be used to give some structure and meaning to the experience of individuals. A qualitative design seemed the logical approach with the expectation that the results might give rise to a particular hypothesis or hypotheses, which could then be quantified.

### **Structure of the thesis:**

Chapter Two contains the literature review and is in two parts. Part one considers the relevant literature on life long learning and the second part outlines the literature on boxing, specifically in North America and in the United Kingdom. In this section is an examination of the work of Wacquant and this chapter concludes with a critique of his work. It also considers some other work which explored capital within the context of sport and provides a useful framework against which the emerging data can be considered. This chapter addresses the first research objective: *An examination of the concept of "body capital" through a critique of Wacquant's methods and findings*

Chapter Three outlines and justifies the methodology and it also outlines in some detail the theories of Bourdieu which are particularly relevant to this study. The method of data collection, specifically interviews and observation, and the method of data analysis are also considered. Bourdieu places considerable emphasis on the issue of reflexivity and the ways in which I interacted with the data is considered in some detail in this chapter, as are issues of reliability and validity.

Chapter Four contains a presentation of the results of the study; the analysis allowed categories within a particular framework to be established. Examples of the categories are given. Whilst there are numerous examples from both interviews and the observation, examples which are particularly pertinent or which typified the category were carefully selected.

Chapter Five is the discussion in which the findings are considered against the available literature and a specific consideration of the interaction of the results with the theories of Bourdieu. The chapter is structured under the subheadings of field, schema, habitus and capital. This allowed a focused consideration. The subsections of the chapter addresses the other three research questions, through the consideration of the results against the available literature.



# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

### Life Long Learning

#### Introduction

The concept of lifelong learning is not new, but in the past decade it has become an extremely fashionable term, prominent in many of the government's policy documents such as "A New Modern and Dependable NHS" (DoH, 1997). The concept is also the cornerstone of the recent White Paper outlining the structure of post 16 education: "Learning to succeed: A New Framework for post 16 Learning" (DfEE,1999). The concept of lifelong learning has become further encoded in the notion of a learning society, by which is meant a society that is geared to learning and the development of its citizens, (Coffield, 2000).

Before commencing the review of the literature, it is important to understand exactly what is meant by life long learning. Cropley (1980) provided a definition: life long learning encompasses the whole of one's life, acquisition and renewal of skills, upgrading of skills and attitudes, self-directed and use of formal, non-formal and informal methods of education.

An useful approach to the study of learning and its impact on people and their life is the concept of capital (Bourdieu developed and used many of these ideas in his theories). Alheit (1999:3) describes capital particularly succinctly:

"in a well known television interview Bourdieu used the metaphor of a casino. We gamble not only with the black chips that represent our economic capital, we also use the blue chips symbolising our cultural capital, our exams and titles, what we know about people, about our minds and bodies, about our society. The red chips represent perhaps the social capital we own, our connections the social access that everyone has. Taken together all these different chips represent our capital"

If one accepts the notion of "capital", it would seem that capital can be added to or subtracted from all of our lives. This section will now consider exactly what is meant by the different types of capital.

## **Economic or Human capital**

Despite this emphasis, life long learning lacks a theoretical framework and it is only fairly recently that some writers have attempted to explore the notion of lifelong learning against a particular theoretical background, (Coffield, 2000). An example of this is the notion of a learning society. Perhaps inherent in the notion of a learning society is the issue of state intervention, and state investment in life long learning. This links closely to the notion of economic or human capital model. This particular model sees individuals in terms of their economic potential. Forrester and Payne (2000) have argued more specifically in terms of economic worth (Garrick, 1998). This means in practice that learning is organised in terms of its relevance to the workplace.

Forrester and Payne (2000) outline the reasons why life long learning has become increasingly important in the political and economic agenda. They argue that in the 1980s a process of de-industrialisation took place, and led to lack of training both in and focussed on the workplace. It became increasingly obvious that there was a need for a flexible skilled work force which can meet increasingly changing skill requirements. This can account for the emphasis on developing the workforce through engaging 16 year olds in some form of education, and to ensure that those in employment develop and extend their knowledge and skills.

The consequences of this are that educational requirements are focussed as "soft skills" or narrow, job specific skills. Young (1998) argues that education is only focussed on the economically active and the appeal for qualifications becomes the all-important factor. These narrow skills do little to enhance the development of a society in which (ideally) "individuals pursue their learning for the good of society" (Edwards, 1994:6). It also means that education is focused on those who are economically active (Cole, 2000). This has repercussions for workers: Bachkiova (2001) goes as far as to say that being treated as economic capital cannot be good for people. Hart (1993) argues that such a model of learning actually hinders a full understanding about many of the wider issues and assumptions concerning the organisation of work and society, (Hart, 1993 as cited by Garrick, 1998 p20).

## **Social Capital**

An alternative to this economic model, a social capital model, is being developed as a means of adding to the understanding of life long learning (Field & Schuller, 2000). Social capital refers to the networks and social resources which people can draw on to deal with social and personal issues (Coleman, 1990). Through the creation of social networks, development of channels of communication and the development of collaborative models, a spirit of co-operation is engendered for mutual benefit. Field argues that social capital can usefully be applied to the acquisition of skills and



knowledge and, more particularly, it can serve as a useful framework for the transmission of tacit knowledge and embedded skills (Field, 2000: 3).

Associated with the concept of social capital is the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) who discuss the notion of communities of practice. They argue that it is through participation and interaction within these communities that learning actually takes place. As such, learning comes about through interaction with other people and is a valuable part of human activity. Their ideas relate to a social capital model of life long learning in the sense that the concept of interaction and engagement are important aspects of learning. In this model of social capital, people are more than economic commodities, as it is through participation that people develop as active citizens and contribute to “the normative goals of a liberal society” (Edwards 1994:8).

Social capital is an interesting concept and has been written about from the perspective of several disciplines including sociology; social policy; social psychology; politics; and political economy. Perhaps because of this eclectic nature there is no clear consensus on what social capital is, and therefore there is no universally agreed definition. The various disciplines all have slightly different emphasis; e.g. psychology and political economy are concerned with attitudes, while sociologists are concerned with networks. Foley and Edwards (1999) outline some of the attributes of social capital: trust, reciprocity and morality, social networks, shared norms of behaviour, sense of commitment and belonging, cohesion in community, connectiveness, and social energy. Foley and Edwards present an analysis of the development of the notion of social capital and draw on the three major theorists Putnam, Coleman, and Bourdieu . Table 1 is my summary of their analysis.

Theorist	Putnam	Coleman	Bourdieu
Foundation	Based on Weber’s assumptions:	Based on rational choice (Durkheim and Parsons)	New Marxist <sup>2</sup> analogy with finance.
Emphasis	Norms of civil engagement Relations give rise to reciprocity.	Membership of social structures gives rise to action within that structure.	One of 3 forms Networks. Volume depends on networks.

Table 1 Analysis of major theorists on capital

<sup>2</sup> Although his thought seems more akin to Weber in that he does not reduce his analysis to economic factors.

They also consider ways in which the concept has been used, particularly in empirical studies: specifically social capital can be used as either a dependent or independent variable. It is important to note that they are not necessarily discussing experimental research, but are examining ways in which the concept can be operationalised. An example of this is the research done by Javie (2003), using social capital as a conceptual tool<sup>3</sup>. He argues that sport (in particular football) can, within a community, do much to enhance social capital.

Kirkpatrick et al (2001), in their consideration of social capital, argue that there are two meanings which can be placed upon the concept of social capital: social capital as community development and social capital as a commodity which the individual can utilise as a particular resource. By social capital as community development they mean that through the development of reciprocal networks and relationships people can act collectively and thereby contribute to the social and economic well being of a community (Falk & Fitzpatrick, 2000). In considering the second usage of the term, they draw on the work of Coleman and Bourdieu, and maintain that while social capital is constructed through social interaction it is also an entity in its own right. In particular it is a resource which can be drawn on and which the individual can use to benefit him or herself, as well as having collective benefit. It seems that when considering social capital that a central issue is the use of social capital as either being collective action or as an entity which can be used as a resource.

## **Cultural Capital**

An approach, which can combine the concepts of social and cultural capital, is the notion of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973). By this is meant the accumulation of knowledge and skills through social and educational experience. In other words, the totality of the individual's experiences, learning opportunities and his or her social position make up cultural capital. Cultural capital can either be advantageous or disadvantageous in certain situations. The basic premise, in the context of life-long learning, is that the skills and knowledge gained in this context will add to the cultural capital of the individual and thereby increase their employability. The notion of cultural capital is strongly linked to social class and, to extend the argument, life-long learning can increase the individual's chances of succeeding, by increasing their social capital and, thereby, making good any class deficit (Hayes, 2004).

This brief analysis of the concept of capital could lead one to assume that economic and social capital are at two different ends of a continuum, and that learning within the work context is in purely economic terms and is not transferable to other situations. The reality may be more complex, with the

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<sup>3</sup> Not a research study but he did draw on specific examples



interplay of knowledge and skills from formal learning, work-based learning and learning within social situations all going to make up the cultural capital of any one individual.

In considering the development of capital, perhaps the key is cultural capital which increases as other types of capital increase. To continue the argument, exposure to life long learning should therefore increase the individual's cultural capital. The economic capital model focusing on narrow job specific learning, it can be argued, does little to increase the individual's cultural capital and makes them only a more efficient (contextual) worker. There is the danger that if this model is followed education is focused on those who are economically active.

Much of the theorising in the area of life long learning is not based upon empirical data, perhaps due to the difficulty of the operationalisation of the concepts of economic, social and cultural capital. Clearly, one way in which these concepts could be operationalised is to explore the development of the career and networks of individuals; this is a fairly lengthy process and would require a longitudinal study. A simpler approach could be to examine skills that the individual gains from exposure to learning situations, which are transferable and will thus increase the cultural capital of the individual. These skills are known as key, generic or transferable skills.

**Physical Capital**

An increasing body of work links sport with the development of physical capital. Bourdieu (1978) wrote about embodied capital within the particular context of "practice" and argued that there are particular ways of working or of practice which are quite distinct from the theoretical or so-called scientific knowledge (Wacquant, 2004). It would seem that Bourdieu goes further than the notion of specific skills being used in a situation or type of work. Rather, practice is very strongly linked to the habitus of the individual. In the day-to-day practice of occupations, trades etc., all types of social interactions are reproduced through the body being used in a particular way. Individual actions, it would seem, reproduce the social order or more specifically the class order, gender relations and individual power and prestige. This can be diagrammatically represented in figure 2:

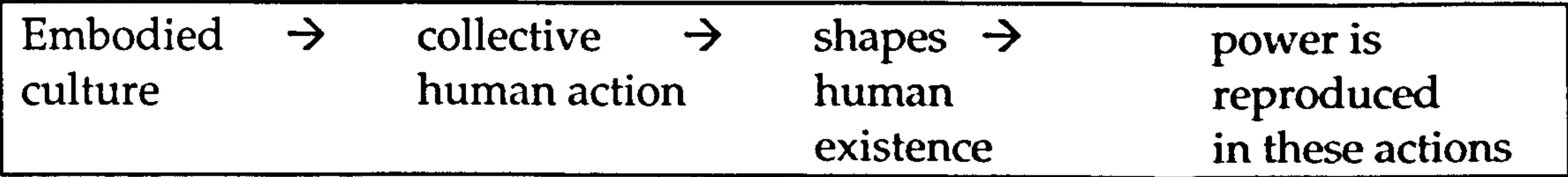


Figure 2 Relationship of the body to the social order

Following this argument through it would seem that involvement in sport is not merely about the particular rules and regulations of the sport, but the sport also reproduces the rules and regulations of the society in which it is situated.

Bourdieu (1997) considers in some detail the interaction of society and sport, and suggests that in any sport there are two areas of concern. The first area is that of product, that is the internal logic and particular system of the sport, in particular the way in which the sport is viewed in comparison with other sports. He also argues that sports are an objective product situated at a particular point in time, which can change as time and situation progress and develop. (Bourdieu, 1978a). His second dimension is the social condition and more specifically the ways in which people from different social conditions interact with sport. He suggests that working class and middle class individuals have very different approaches to and conceptualisation of sporting activities.

He develops this theme by stating that sport can often represent class struggle and he gives the example of the ways in which middle classes (bourgeoisie) in rural France can, through sport clubs, provide a strong control over the popular classes and establish political dominance. Tied in with this is the concept that the same sport can have a very different meaning depending on one's social class; for example for the working class:

“the sport's market is the boys' physical capital as the system of beauty prizes and the occupation to which they lead is for the girls”  
(Bourdieu, 1978a: 832)

This, then, means that the participant can also have his or her social position reinforced (Light, 2004). Associated with this notion of the development of physical capital and the ascendancy of the middle classes, indeed the concept of sport as a constructive activity, is the genesis of many sports. Bourdieu, (1978) and Kirk, (1999) argue that modern sport emerged from the public school system in nineteenth century Britain, and much of the *raison d'être* of sport is to establish moral fortitude in its participants.

More recently some scholars have taken Bourdieu's work and applied them to sport. Shilling (1991) takes up the notion of capital and considers the concept of physical capital.<sup>4</sup> He maintains that physical capital should be contextualised against broader definitions of capital. According to Shilling, Bourdieu used his concept of human capital in three ways: that of institutional capital which means the tangible features, which are valued by society: qualifications, degrees etc., objectified capital: books, journals etc. and

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<sup>4</sup> Wacqaunt considered the development of physical capital within the specific context of boxing and he used the term “body capital”. Unless discussing others' work the term ‘body capital’ will be used when the findings from this study are being discussed.



embodied capital: dispositions and attitudes of society which are embodied and enacted by individuals.

Within this framework, Shilling (1991) defines physical capital as “a social formation of bodies through sport, leisure and other activities” (p. 654). It is important to link this with embodied capital. This allows an analysis of the interface of the central dispositions of society and class relations being played out through the individual use of the body. Importantly Shilling (1991) sees physical capital being very much tied in with social class the approach to the body depends on one’s societal position. He sees (perhaps simplistically) the working class approach to the body as a means to an end (physical capital is used to better their position they occupy in society), while for the middle classes physical capital is an end in itself.

Armour (1999) examines ways in which embodiment interacts with (physical) education. Basing her ideas on the work of Hargreaves (1986), Foucault (1975) and Bourdieu (1978), she argues that the body is the site on which many of the battles of class, race and gender are fought (Hargreaves, 1986) and the body becomes subject to social controls and interventions. Sport is a major factor in the establishment of embodiment, that is ways in which the body is used to represent the social identity of the individual can be shaped and influenced through participation in sport. Foucault’s theories about the body are that it is subject to social power and the body becomes subject to social controls and restrictions. For her, embodiment is, as for Bourdieu, a means by which the societal dispositions are enacted by the individual in terms of the use of the body. Physical education is a means of developing embodiment and this should therefore be explicitly addressed in education.

Kirk (1999) broadens the argument by discussing the notion of physical culture, by this he means that the interactions of individual and particularly society’s interaction with physical exercise of any type is quite specific to a particular historical time and place and it provides:

“the resources for individuals to engage meaningfully, with greater or lesser success, in the myriad complex practices of sport, physical recreation and exercise.” (Kirk, 1999: 68)

Light (2004) applies Bourdieu’s theories to rugby and he, on the basis of empirical research, argues that, in addition to practical knowledge of what is involved in the actual activity, much of the mores of society are implicit in the practice of a particular sport. Through that practice the social structures are embedded in the habitus. He demonstrated ways in which masculine hegemony is reproduced through learning the practice of rugby.

Both Bourdieu’s original ideas and the subsequent development of these ideas by other workers, either through empirical work or philosophical

development would indicate that sport does not exist in a vacuum but is a product of socio-institutional evolution, and specifically can transmit the values of society.

## **Transferable Skills**

A concept central to both the human capital and social capital models of lifelong learning is the notion of transferable, generic or key skills (Garrick, 1998). The idea is there is a core set of skills which transcend the individual situation and can therefore be taken and used in other situations and settings. The Dearing Report on Higher Education (1998), particularly emphasised the development of these skills and, indeed, a large focus of this report was on the relationship of education to the workplace. Transferable skills as defined by Dearing provides a useful working definition:

“There is much evidence of support for the further development of a range of skills during higher education, including what we term the key skills of communication, both oral and written, in numeracy, the use of communications and information technology and learning how to learn. We see these as necessary outcomes of all higher education programmes.” (Dearing Report, 1998: 38)

The assumption being made is that the explicit development of these skills enables people to become flexible and transfer effectively from situation to situation. This is particularly relevant in the human capital model of life long learning, the argument being that life long learning makes a flexible work force. Transferable skills also can be linked to the social capital model, as these skills can be transferred to other settings and used for the good of others in the wider community.

## **Types of Learning**

Colley et al (2005) discuss formal, informal and non-formal learning within the context of life long learning. They draw on a number of classifications, for example Eraut (2000) who discusses formal and non formal learning. The most useful definition is that of the European Commission (2001) who identify:

**Formal learning:** learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

**Non-formal learning:** learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is,



however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

**Informal learning:** learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental" / random) (p32-33). (As cited by Colley et al , 2005:10)

This definition has been selected as it differentiates between formal and non-formal, despite acknowledging its existing, Colley et al and most of the writes in the area concentrate their discussion on formal and informal approaches. Learning the art of boxing would seem to fall into the category of non-formal learning.

Transferable skills are interesting in that they transcend learning situations and are thought to link formal learning to the workplace (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Whereas learning can and does take place in formal settings, it also does take place informally. McGiverny (1991) outlines situations of potential experiential learning; work related, work focussed, work enabling, work centred, academically qualifying, community related and leisure related. Within this categorisation, elements of both human capital and social capital can be identified.

The main question, which arises from the above discussion, is-- when do experiences become learning? Garrick (1998) and Marswick & Watkins (1990) argue that the important issue in experiential learning lies in making the process of learning conscious. The individual should be consciously aware of the knowledge and skills they have gained through their work based and other types of experiences. Experiential learning, in the sense of work-based learning, can be organised through the formulation of competencies, in which the individual is required to demonstrate achievement. Other types of learning are perhaps more difficult to encapsulate and rely on the individual's reflection and articulation of their experiences.

Much of the debates in life long learning are around some of the wider issues and in particular about the social aspects of life long learning and learning in the work place. Colley et al (2005) in their consideration of life long learning maintains there is a definite tension between individual and social aspects of learning. They maintain that:

Learning is a social and relational process which is shaped by the social context in which it occurs (Colley et al, 2005:29)

Many of these ideas are encapsulated in the notion of learning careers, in which the structure and process of individuals' lives interact with their learning or educational trajectory (Bloomer, 1996). In this context Bourdieu's concept of habitus is particularly relevant and has been embraced by many of the theorists (Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 2000, Gallagher et al, 2002, for example). The basic idea of habitus lies in the sense of a structure which mediates between the individual and the outside world, the central argument being that identities are socially constructed and are linked to a whole series of interactions including culture and the particular practices in which the individual has been involved (Lawy & Bloomer, 2003). They go on to argue that in today's world there are many opportunities for self expression and that there is real choice in determining education and career pathways. It is through engagement with practice that knowledge is developed, and this knowledge in its turn can lead to change.

However, much of the writing on learning careers ignores structural inequalities and on reading the accounts one almost gets the impression that individuals have free choice. Now, Bourdieu and his concept of habitus is cited as a theoretical basis for learning careers and central to this concept is the development through one's social position and how it can act as a determinant for the choices that are made. In other words people are not free agents but rather their life choices are determined by their class position. Clearly people can and do break the mould but not to the degree which is suggested by learning careers.

The central argument, from Bourdieu, is that the disposition of the individual is shaped by social forces or more specifically the position in the world determines how people behave and act. Situations (or field) can further shape and reinforce this disposition. Put in another way, people have a degree of cultural capital, the closer they are to the dominant class the greater the cultural capital and this determines how they interact with learning. The central issues seem to be if there are ways in which capital can be added to by learning or is the habitus so strong that it determines the approach to learning and therefore some people are more advantaged than others.

In terms of capital the questions arises: does an increase in body capital or in social capital also increase cultural capital. It would seem from a consideration of the literature that body capital is very much tied in with notion of social class and does little to increase cultural capital. The following section of the review will develop this idea and will consider in some detail this question against the context of amateur and professional boxing.



## Boxing

In comparison with other sports e.g. swimming and football, the academic literature on boxing is comparatively scant; although there are important studies in the area by Wacquant (1992) and Sugden (1987). Additionally, several "literary" writers such as Hemingway, Norman Mailer and others have all written on boxing.

### Historical dimension

The roots of boxing go back to the earliest times. Boxing was an ancient Olympian sport and the earliest mention of boxing is in the ancient Greek Theokritos, who in *Idylls* (ca 275BC) writes about the prize fighter Amykos and gives descriptions reminiscent of modern day boxing:

“Then Amykos, hoping desperately for a knockout punch, seized Polydeukes’ left hand in his own left hand and leaned sideways in his forward lunge and reached down to his right side to bring up a huge haymaker. Had he landed the blow....” (Miller,1991:34).

This description is not dissimilar, to a description of a modern boxing match, although holding the opponents hand would not be allowed in today’s boxing match.

Miller (1991) in his analysis points out that Plato (350 BC) mentions boxing and advocates the need for training and good preparation for the match. Plutonium (AD100) also mentions boxing and the wearing of protection on the hands can make blows soft and painless. With the Olympic Games' demise, boxing was no longer particularly fashionable. In the Roman Empire parallels are drawn between modern prize fighting and the gladiators. While there are undoubted similarities there are clear differences, not least of which is the fact that modern boxing is not a fight to the death. It would seem that in the ancient world boxing was seen as character building, as were the other Olympic sports. This is an important point, as with the development of the public school system, the principle of sport as a means of developing moral character was firmly established.

More recently modern boxing can be said to have its origins in Renaissance Italy, in 13 century Sienna, where St. Bernadine encourages young men to fight in a controlled manner, and not to fight with cudgels and sticks. This has parallels with the 2002 statement by David Blunkett (the then Home Secretary) that boxing can prevent trouble.

Class relations are reflected in the history of boxing. In Stuart times there are records of the existence of fighting booths, and the sport seemed to gain popularity in the years leading to and throughout the industrial revolution.

Donnelly (1988) argues that prize fighting in the early eighteenth century grew out of disputes, which were settled by physical fighting between adversaries. At around this time Britain became gripped with a gambling fever (Foreman, 2003) and these fights became the subject of gambling mainly by the upper and middle classes.

Sheard (1997) argues that James Figg invented the modern concept of boxing as a sport, and in doing so he put boxing on a business footing. James Broughton was a prizefighter of this time and he was also responsible for establishing the basis of the modern sport. Broughton introduced, in 1850, a set of rules, which became known as the Broughton Rules. At this time, Parliament and the notion of Parliamentary Debate was considerably developed, conflict was settled by words rather than physical resolution. In particular the middle class was emerging as a strong societal force and boxing was seen as uncivilised, and not unsurprisingly, boxing became increasingly in conflict with authorities. Boxing soon became subject to social control.

Korr (1986) further develops these ideas and provides an interesting insight in that he argues that the dominance of the middle classes was characterised by both strong social stratification, everyone knowing their place in society, and the facility the middle classes had for hypocrisy. The Municipality Reform Act (1835) created a system of local government, with localities taking responsibility for certain activities. While the aristocracy supported boxing, the emerging middle classes in many areas drove prize fighting underground. Therefore, boxing could be tolerated sometimes; specifically boxing is fine as long as there are rules to protect people. It was also within this context that the athletic club was established in 1864. A member of this club, John Graham Chambers devised the so-called Queensbury Rules (thus called because of the patronage of the Marquis of Queensbury), which insisted on gloves and also restricted the length of rounds.

Sheard (1997) provides a useful framework for the analysis of the history and development of boxing. He uses the concept developed by Elias and Dunning (1986)- *the civilising process*, as a method of analysis. The basis of this argument is that traditionally individuals have enjoyed watching blood sports and sports involving violence. As society moves forward in time it becomes increasingly more civilized and violence is less and less tolerated. Sugden (1996), in his discussion, develops many of these ideas and he states that developing societies proportionately use less physical violence as a means of imposing law and order; conflicts are handled by argument. In sport violence is also subject to disapproval, but Sheard (1997) argues that the violence in sport is often hidden. Defences are constructed around the sports, which hide the violence. Sheard has considered the history of boxing within this framework and argues that the impact of the civilising process has meant that boxing has over the years become more and more civilised. However, much



of this civilising process is superficial and does little to enhance the safe elements rather make the sport socially acceptable

Over the years further physical protection has been added: padded gloves, gum shields, head guards and groin protectors. In addition outside controlling agencies have been introduced: referees and panels of judges all monitor boxing matches. Sheard (1997) argues that many of these rules are cosmetic and are mechanisms which appear in society rather than actually prevent injury. This is illustrated by use of a head guard. The idea is that it will prevent damage to the head or more specifically brain damage while preventing eye injuries and cuts. It can obscure vision making the boxer more vulnerable and does little to prevent brain trauma. Being punched on the head causes the brain to be shaken within the closed box of the skull and a head guard does nothing to prevent this from happening. However an important factor is that in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century medical control of boxing was established. Society's relation with boxing is, therefore complex, there seems to be a definite class divide and as time progresses, an increasing discomfort with boxing activities.

It is interesting to compare the development of boxing in the United States of America, as it mirrors, in many ways what was happening in the United Kingdom. For example, in both countries boxing enjoyed a high level of popularity in the 1960s and early 1970s with the appeal of Muhammad Ali. Sammons (1990) undertakes an analysis of the sport in America, where, like Britain, there has been an increasing tension between boxing and an increasingly civilised society. Sammons while exploring this tension, focuses in particular both on the notion of racial tensions (as seen through boxing in professional boxing) and organised crime.

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century slave fighting was a spectator sport. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many states made prize fighting illegal. New Orleans however, introduced clubs, which made prize fighting more socially acceptable. Despite this increase in the popularity of prizefighting, fighting rarely took place between races, the reason being, Sammon argues, that fights were seen as a fight for moral/physical superiority and mixed race fighting was unacceptable to the people of the time. This segregation continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was unthinkable for many that a black boxer would fight against a white fighter. For instance in 1919 the heavy weight champion Jack Dempsey refused to fight against a black fighter. However the colour ban was relaxed with the advent of Joe Louis. Although black, Louis was seen as "clean living" and a good boxer, he had a positive image although he had to abide by a set of rules which ensured he could take his place in society - i.e. be acceptable to white people. So Louis was the acceptable black in that he behaved in the expected manner. His popularity increased when he fought (on two occasions) the German fighter Schmeling and this was symbolised by many as a good versus evil. Sugar Ray Robinson (1996) describes the impact

that these fights had on him and America where there were major events with almost everyone listening on the radio. Joe Louis' high profile and efforts also increased boxing and blacks' standing in society.

In the 1960s boxing became an increasingly popular sport. Much of this was the impact of the heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay). While impressing people with his powers in the ring, he also did much for race relations. He certainly represented much of the black struggle in the 1960s and, with his stance against Vietnam was identified with by black and white people alike.

Sammons (1990) in his historical overview also considers another determinant in boxing history in the US, the organised crime that was around boxing, associated with gambling. He maintains that during the late 1930's and, certainly in the post-war years, organised crime based on gambling was rife. For example, Rocky Grangano and Sugar Ray Robinson were both offered money to lose fights. Shannon (1990) outlines the efforts of Frank Hogan, an Assistant District Attorney's efforts to combat crime. He became the model for Elliot Ness, only his battle was not with prohibition but with organised crime in and around sport and gambling. Frankie Cambo was a focal point for this organised activity and through Hogan's efforts he was gaoled in 1960s. Sammons (1990) argues that the function of crime, or one of the functions, was for many a way for making money. It also took some of the focus off the harmful effects of boxing; the negative images were tied up with crime rather than physical injuries.

The early part of the last century was characterised by the dominance of the US based New York State Athletic Association, which controlled all the major fights. As a reaction to the monopoly of this organisation, the National Boxing Association was formed in the US and in Europe the International Boxing Association and the British Board of Boxing Control became involved in the control and outcomes of fights. In recent years the British Board of Boxing Control concentrates on safety and medical status and retains the right to license boxers to fight.

Sugden, (1996:49) outlines the recent history of boxing and points out that in 1947 the International Boxing Club was formed which dominated the heavyweight scene in the 1950s. With the purge of organised crime associated with boxing in the 1940s and 1950s the International Boxing Club was disbanded and was replaced by the World Boxing Association, (WBA) an American based organised. The World Boxing Council (WBC) was formed to represent the interests of the other parts of the world. This came into conflict with the WBA and when the presidency of the WBA was lost by the Americans, its headquarters moved to Venezuela. This lead to yet another boxing association, the International Boxing Federation (IBF). In 1988 the World Boxing Organisation was formed (WBO). The aim of these organisation



is to promote fights and crown champions. Perhaps the more fights there are, and consequently the more money to be made, is the crude *raison d'être* of these organisations.

As a sport boxing is highly stratified and strongly organised. There is a clear difference in terms of organisation and structure between amateur and professional boxers. Additionally there are roles for trainers, managers and promoters. In both the US and the UK there are a handful of promoters who dominate the sport and control the key boxing matches. The promoter Don King dominates international boxing, with many of the major boxing matches falling under his control. He also is thought to be responsible for changing the face of boxing in ensuring most boxing matches are shown as "pay-as-you-view" TV; this ensured vast profits for the managers and promoters and taking much of the sport from mainstream television.

An overview of the history of boxing would indicate that sport, and certainly boxing, is very much tied in with the social forces inherent in society. Donnelly (1988) brings this point to the fore in his discussion on boxing. He maintains that there are grounds for the abolition of boxing on medical grounds, on the basis that boxers can be exploited and on the grounds that, for society, boxing can be brutal and degrading. In view of the fairly controversial nature of boxing it is important to acknowledge these themes. The issue of exploitation, degradation and brutalisation are ones which will be considered in this study.

Boxing does not exist in a vacuum and reflects particular societal issues. Both in the US and in Britain its history indicates that it does reflect current trends in society. Elias and Dunning (1986) make the argument that as society becomes more civilised violent sports become marginalised or sanitised, in an attempt to make them more acceptable to society. Boxing is a sport where one person attempts to subdue the other person by hitting or punching him. It is a sport in which the participants are expected to demonstrate a high degree of skill, but it must in some way be made acceptable to society and the focus should be on the skill rather than the less acceptable aspect of boxing. One way in which this is done is by emphasising the hard work and discipline which makes up boxing, or are involved in the preparation for the sport. These are desirable attributes and would set the young man off on the right path for the rest of his life. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century boxing was part of the sporting activity in public schools, it was also a sport practised by the working classes or a so-called "prole sport" (Bourdieu, 1978a and Wilson, 2002). The discipline and focus made it suitable, in a paternalistic way, for the working classes. It would seem to keep the young man on the straight and narrow. Boxing history abounds with stories of people who were saved from a life of crime through participation in boxing (Oates, 1998). High profile examples of this are Sonny Liston, Mike Tyson and Rocky Marciano.

## Social demography of boxing

As has been previously stated in the introduction to this section, there is a singular lack of academic work on boxing, there were some studies produced in the past fifty years or so, however in the past 15 years two important studies have been produced by Sugden, (1987) and Wacquant, (1992). These studies have explored the ways in which boxing interacts with society. The studies were ethnographic in nature and by definition looked at a specific situation in some detail and thereby offers some valuable insights.

The earlier studies are quite explicitly socio-demographic: Weinberg and Arond (1952) produced the earliest study and they studied boxers from the Chicago area all of whom (as would be expected) were boys and young men almost exclusively immigrants or the children of immigrants. They found a distinct pattern in the ethnic origin of boxers: in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were mainly of Irish origin, then mainly Italian, and more recently (to the time of their study) African Americans and Latinos. They also found that many of the young men took up boxing because of influences in the neighbourhood or from their families.

Hare (1971) carried out an investigation into the demographics of the "black fighter", again in the Chicago area. This was a study of 58 boxers and ex-boxers and (unsurprisingly) he found that the boxers were predominantly from working class backgrounds and only 35% had fathers living at home. He also found that many came into boxing through street fighting (48%) which was a way of surviving in a tough environment. Hare maintains that for the successful fighter it is a good way of making money and thereby helping their families. He found that only half the retired boxers had saved money earned through fighting and many of the retired fighters he studied found it difficult to adjust to ordinary life. Clearly, while all black people do not become boxers the argument is that boxing does represent a way for people from low socio-economic groups to better themselves.

Wacquant, in his 1992 study, sees the gym as a way of organising the violence which takes place on the street (in ghetto areas). He sees the individual joining the gym much as the same as an individual starting a career as a criminal. His main argument is:

"Young men raised and living in contemporary ghetto, are very easily accustomed to a range of predatory behaviours entailing the most varied and seemingly anarchic forms of physical and economic violence, before which the controlled violence of boxing cannot but pale" (p 229).

He concludes by stating



“ the boxing gym defines itself in a relation of symbiotic opposition to the surrounding ghetto” (p 236).

Despite this strong statement Wacquant goes on to argue that boxers generally come from the popular classes, yet they do not come from the lowest stratum of society (this was based on an analysis of 27 fighters in Chicago). He concludes by stating that everything suggests that boxers come from a slightly higher social stratum than their neighbours. A recent British television programme (2004) “Boxing Academy”, which selected 10 young men who were trained and schooled as boxers over a four week period, illustrated this point; with one exception, they all were from traditional working class backgrounds. As with Wacquant’s finding they by no means represented the so-called underclass.

Implicit throughout Wacquant’s writing on boxing is the interface of practice with the social; in particular, with ways in which the disadvantaged position of many in society may be reinforced. This is encapsulated by Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992:201) statement:

The most personal is the most impersonal, that many of the most intimate dramas the deepest malaises, the most singular suffering that men and women can experience find their roots in the objective contradictions, constraints and double binds inscribed in the structure of the labour market, the school system and housing or in the mechanics of economics and social inheritance.

This quotation emphasises, as is typical of Bourdieu's theories, it emphasises the interaction of the individual's personhood and the structures of society. Specifically the ways in which the class or position in life shape and focus the individuals and the ways in which knowledge is co-constructed through reciprocity between the individual and social experience.

### **Social Organisation of boxing**

Sugden (1987) carried out a sociological study of the organisation of boxing. Although an English academic, Sugden carried out his study in Connecticut (America). In common with the other studies, cited, he investigated a boxing gym in a socially deprived area. The gym encouraged working class males on the margin of society to engage in a purposeful activity. He found that the gym was organised in a meaningful way; an astute businessman described by Sugden as part missionary and part guy on the make, ran it.

From this study, he argued that boxing could represent opportunities for many in the ghetto, which establishes a desire in some to find a way out of the ghetto and through the focused and relentless pursuit of boxing, he can better his position in society. The ambivalence lies in the view society has of boxing

and whilst it is seen as violent by many owes its survival to the notion that boxing clubs and participation in this sport can prevent trouble and put many on the "straight and narrow". However, many trainers and promoters use these clubs as farms in which potential professionals (and champions) are nurtured and developed, which are:

"relations of oppression and exploitation by hiding them under them under the cloak of nature, benevolence and meritocracy"  
(Wacquant, (1993:2), cited by Sugden, (1996:186))

Sugden based his work on detailed ethnography and added to its generalisability by two further studies. Sugden (1996) followed his study of a boxing gym in the USA with two further studies on boxing, one in Northern Ireland and one in Cuba. Certainly, from his Northern Ireland study his conclusions were broadly similar to those from the US. Whilst there were clear differences between the two cultures, not least of which was the sectarianism in Northern Ireland, much of boxing took place in a the ghetto whether it be that of a predominantly black ghetto in the US or the Catholic ghetto in Belfast, boxing takes place in a working class situation. The central point being that:

"Boxing sub-culture is sustained by a mixture of aggressive masculinity generated by lower-working-class communities, the capacity of boxing to provide a positively sanctioned channel for this trait and the impression that the sport can provide a temporary or even permanent sanctuary from poverty" (Sugden, 1996:92)

The boxing gym represents order and restraint in an uncertain world, yet while it is a way of keeping youths off the street Sugden argues the primary motivation is to win boxing matches and promote the club. It may not represent the same (financial) rewards as the professional game but the underlying, somewhat ambivalent dynamics are the same.

In his ethnographic study in Cuba (in the early 1990s) Sugden found boxing taking place against a strong tradition of physical education in schools taught from an early age. Cuba was a relatively poor country and, he points out, the average diet of the Cuban is impoverished by Western standards, yet paradoxically it may keep people fit. Success in amateur boxing may bring the individual much acclaim. Additionally, there is not much to do and participating in boxing can give the young man a sense of purpose. Therefore, as in his other situations, participation in the sport can lead to recognition and improvement in lifestyle. One can conclude that the underlying dynamics are no different than in Hartford, or in Northern Ireland. Boxing for the poor represents a way of improving the lot of the individual, not too dissimilar to that which is found in other countries, where boxing is seen as a way of improving one's situation in life.



A strong theme in Sugden's work is the notion of exploitation. In his book (Sugden, 1996) he entitles one of his chapters, describing the gym in Connecticut, as "The Exploitation of Disadvantage". Certainly, in the context of the US he sees boxing as a way for poor young men, usually but not exclusively black, to better themselves, as encapsulated by the following quotation:

"It makes them dependent on boxing not only as a source of income but also as a touchstone of personal pride and self respect, *it equips them with few other skills*" (Sugden, 1996:52, my italics).

The important point being made is that boxing can be seen as a way out of poverty. Whilst "a few do make the big time", boxing is a skill that almost seems to be an end in itself and does not really lead to anywhere else. For many therefore once the boxing career is over there is not much else left. Thirty years earlier Weinberg and Arond (1952) outlined these phenomena. And it is, perhaps, seen today many boxers return to boxing long past the time when they should have retired. Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Robinson are examples of this and more recently, (2003), when he found himself in financial difficulties, Frank Bruno indicated a desire to return to the boxing ring.

The French sociologist Wacquant (1992 & 2004) undertook an ethnographic study of boxing in Chicago, focusing on largely one gym, although he did interact and consider the wider boxing scene in Chicago. Wacquant approached boxing from the perspective of criminology and the underclass and sees boxing as a viable alternative for many under privileged young men. He studied the activity of boxing through a 3-year period of fieldwork in Chicago in a very deprived area with poor housing, schools and health care. His methodology was: observation/participant observation in a gym, attendance at professional and amateur tournaments and in-depth interviews in the final 4 months of his study.

In his study Wacquant (1992) found that the gym represented an order in what often was a chaotic environment. He found that the successful boxers were not generally from the extreme margins of society but from structured families (not necessarily with both parents). He was also interested in the structural organisation of the gym, that it was highly structured, it was an overwhelmingly male environment and there were implicit rules to protect the masculine environment. For example, one boxer brought his girl friend and was made to fight a tougher opponent; the humiliation acted as a deterrent, yet despite this there is little mention anywhere else of similar ways of control.

Wacquant (1998) also writes about the economic, organisational aspects of professional boxing. He argues that it is based on a supply-demand model,

with the boxers supplying their skills to meet a particular demand. There is an infrastructure to support the boxer, managers, trainers and promoters for instance, and he argues that within the structural framework of boxing, the key player is the matchmaker, who has to negotiate bureaucratic, economic and above all pugilistic constraints. It is his (and it is almost always a "his") job to match fighters, to make an interesting fight and to ensure that boxers have suitable opponents. Therefore in such a structured world, before the boxer can be paid the manager, promoters and matchmakers take their cut. Unsurprisingly, boxers see themselves as being exploited. Wacquant (2001) suggested that this exploitation is seen in imagery in which boxers use to describe their craft: **prostitution**, for example as one of his respondents stated, "They're all pimps the promoters.....and boxers are all whores" - p182. Imagery of the **plantation**, where boxers are likened to slaves, (particularly apt as most of Wacquant's boxers were black) and imagery of **animal husbandry**: whereby boxers were likened to stallions.

Despite this sense of injustice boxers rarely do anything about it. Wacquant (2001) suggests this is because boxers are used to an environment where exploitation is taken as a matter of course. Boxers relish being at the centre of production and see themselves as plying their trade. Thirdly, he suggests that many boxers think that they will be the one to change things.

## **Trajectory**

Sugden (1987) found the social set up to be highly stratified and he clearly outlined the stages a young man would take in becoming a professional boxer. Clearly, all did not follow this process, for instance many stayed in the amateur domain (outlined below). Sugden also makes the point that amateur and professional boxing can be so dissimilar as to be different sports, nonetheless the route to professional boxing being through the amateur ranks although many remain at this stage and do not go on to become professional boxers.



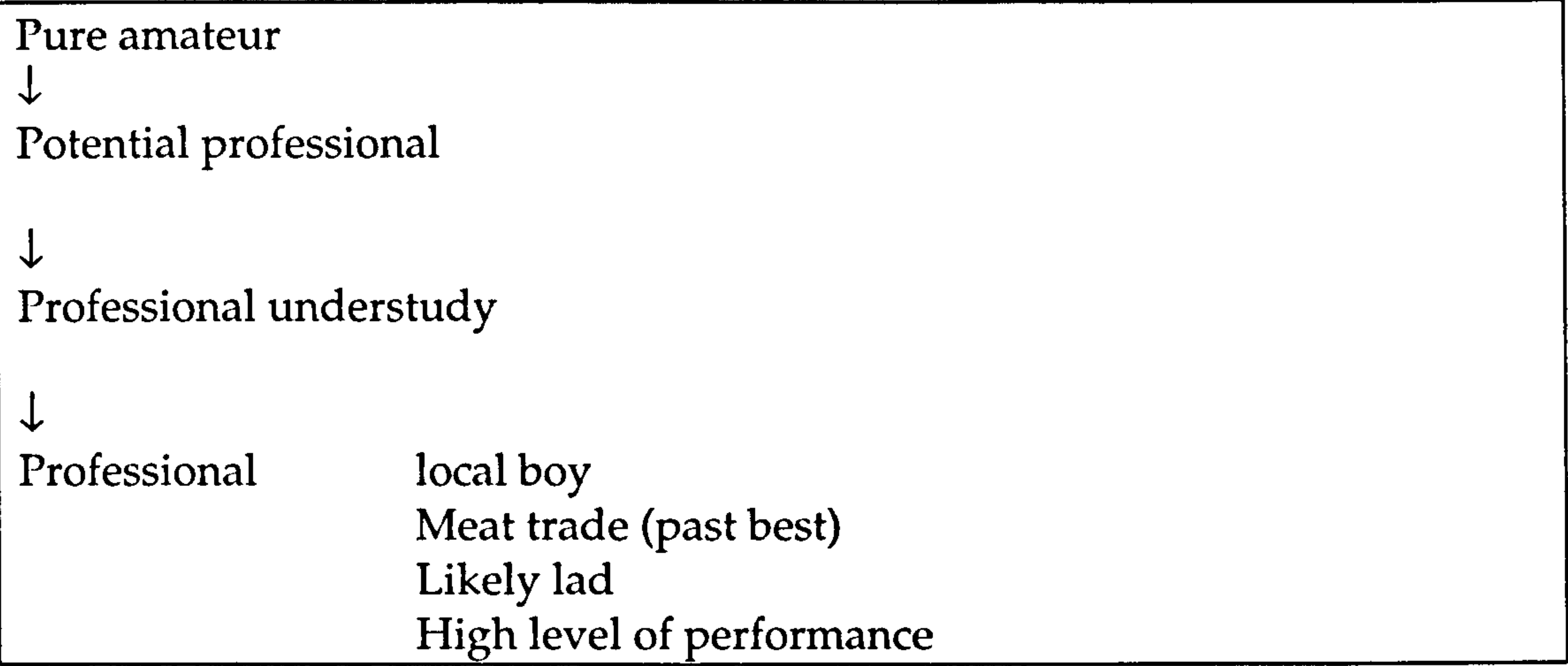


Figure 3 Representation of Sugden’s Trajectory (1987)

Craft of Boxing

Unlike the other studies Wacquant (1992 and 2004) examined the mechanics of the craft of boxing in some detail and he argued that training was designed to transmit a "corporal, visual and mental schemata". Training provided a structure which would develop and integrate the schemata. Although, Wacquant does not refer to Schön’s work, boxing is the embodiment of Schön’s “reflection – in – action” (Schon, 1983). Boxing is a highly skilled activity involving a high degree of physical fitness, dexterity, style and ability to think quickly. Wacquant maintains boxing requires mental and bodily schemata, in which the mind and body act in unison. Wacquant was strongly influenced by Bourdieu and he discusses the habitus of the boxer. He argues that boxing is a fusion of the mental and physical. Inherent in boxing is a paradox in that it is skilled and thoughtful, yet there is little time for thinking in the ring and the boxer must think automatically. This is described as a fusion of the habitus with the field that produced it. He draws on Bourdieu’s logic of practice; and by this he maintains that boxing is dependent on schemata upon which practice is based. The body is in the course of learning boxing, redefined and training is the practical mastery of corporal, visual and mental schemata.

Ingredients of training include activities, such as shadow boxing, hitting the bags, speed bag, skipping and stomach exercises. Training involved both specific work on skills, but (an important theme in Wacquant) also to learn to control emotions. Sparring is an important aspect of the training. Choosing a partner is a delicate matter, requiring a negotiation of the pecking order. In particular sparring helps the individual acquire the eye of the boxer and to negotiate the delicate skills of perceptual, emotional and physical labour. Emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) is important as the individual must control his emotions to be a successful boxer. The boxer must also manage to

learn to control pain. He concludes that boxing involves a fusion of intellectual-habitual, rational-emotional and corporal-mental.

He defines this as:

"an intelligent comprehension of the body that goes beyond a visual/mental mastery" (Wacquant, 1992:240).

Joyce Carol Oates (1987) has written a monograph on boxing, and while it is based on her reflections and observations does provide some valuable insights. She claims that boxing has strong links to the Roman gladiators and that watching boxing is a similar phenomenon. It would seem that people have an instinct to see blood drawn. To prepare herself for writing the book Oates watched videos of fights where two boxers were savaged in the ring and argues that boxing holds a fascination and cannot really be considered in the same way as other sports.

She also highlights the skill of the boxer and the necessity of a boxer being able to take punches and be knocked down and still come back with more punches and retaliate with a stronger punch. Wacquant emphasises this aspect and argues that boxing is not just about defending but also is about attacking. The important aspect of this is that the attack is controlled and is never carried out in anger.

Oates (1987 and 1992) maintains that the aspect of inflicting hurt and pain on another cannot be ignored and she quotes Sugar Ray Robinson who stated, after seriously injuring an opponent,

"Sir, they pay me to get folk into trouble" (Robinson, 1996:143).

Another interesting feature is the classification of boxers. Hare (1971) differentiates between a slugger and a scientific boxer. Weinberg and Arond (1952) suggest the following categories puncher/mauler as opposed to a boxer, cream puff: unable to hit hard, butcher: hits hard and can inflict damage.<sup>5</sup> This is of interest as certain boxers can, by virtue of their particular style, be said to influence boxing. Sugar Ray Robinson, developed the notion of the scientific boxer and Muhammad Ali introduced psychological one-up-manship.

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<sup>5</sup> Wacquant (1995a) argues that people's body type dictates their style.



## Portrayal of the Boxer

There is a great deal written in the popular press about boxing, for instance, there are many biographies and autobiographies of boxers. Whilst these are not subject to the rigours of academic writing and research, they do contain many useful insights to the sport. In particular accounts of boxing were either first hand (Mathews, 2001 or Anasi, 2002) or were those written as observers or from a journalistic stance (Beattie, 1996 and Allsop, 2003). There are fairly consistent descriptions of boxers and it is worth highlighting those particular characteristics of both boxer and trainer. Four works will be considered Allsop, (2003). Mathews, (2001); Beattie, (1996) who considered British boxing and Anasi, (2003) who examined boxing in the United States.

Generally, the boxers are portrayed as naïve and almost pathetically keen to better themselves. Beattie, however, also considers the champion boxer Naseem Hamed who has a strong degree of arrogance, not common in all boxers, but there are many examples of the more typical boxer. Typically the boxer is a young man who sees boxing as a way out of working class life and he is generally seen as cocky with a degree of vulnerability. This is consistent across the writers; Mathews highlights this when he described one of the boxers:

“ Even though he never stopped talking (usually about himself) and was a constant irritant, Danny had an endearing quality about him. Perhaps it was his vulnerability, coupled with a sense of insecurity and honesty, character traits most fighters have in abundance.” (Mathews, 2001:121).

Similarly, Anasi describes a similar type of boxer in the United States. Boxers are largely, although not exclusively, drawn from working class backgrounds. Similarly, the trainers, highlighted in their books, were of a similar ilk. They were very experienced, slightly unorthodox men who looked on their role as that of social workers in developing their boxer and keeping young men out of trouble. Anasi's trainer was a more colourful character, often at odds with the boxing establishment. Beattie (1996) describes Brendan Ingles, Naseem Hamed's trainer, as very much in this mould as does Allsop (2003:33) who states:

“Hughes, 62, and awarded the MBE for his services to the club and the community, is driven by the satisfaction of channeling raw aggression and moulding crude talent into champions and decent citizens”.

Mathews (2001) is a journalist who describes how, at the age of 30 with no previous boxing experience, he trained as a boxer and engaged in one professional fight. Matthew's work is not in a formal sense research, but he does have a degree of reflexivity and was consciously observing, describing

and reflecting and he also has some important insights and is therefore worth acknowledging. He does highlight an area understated by both Sugden and Wacquant: that is the interaction between the fighters (outside the ring) and what the training process actually felt like. While Wacquant did participate in boxing training he did not intend to engage in professional fighting and therefore his perspective is inevitably different. Matthews described hierarchies in the training gym and ways in which these hierarchies were maintained, e.g. in sparing a “cocky” junior fighter was severely handled to teach him his place. He also describes the rigours of training, diet and the relationship with his trainer.

Interestingly, an additional feature of the books, and particularly that of Beattie, was the approach to working class life. Each of the authors have no problems in strongly linking boxing and the working class. It is a fascinated, almost anthropological approach, which they all take. Beattie (1996) highlights pawn shops, working men’s clubs, etc. as the background to boxing. Mathews (2001) describes the trainer’s love and likens it to the BBC situation comedy “The Royale Family.” Anasi (2003) makes the point that boxing allows working class young men to adopt middle class values of focus and commitment.

Interestingly, in Anasi’s book there is mention of a female boxer who plays a fairly central role and actually spars with the men, including Anasi. This is unusual, as in all three of the other books boxing is seen as an exclusively male domain with women playing a peripheral role and certainly not participating in the sport. In the boxing press there is some mention of female boxers and Anasi could be reflecting a growing trend in boxing, his book was based in the US and does seem to reflect a growing trend.

These pictures are important to acknowledge, as they are clear perceptions of the writers and those which are shared by a number of people. They come from a basis in reality and while by no means that of all boxers, are useful to note. It is also interesting that the series of values etc. are associated with working class, as quite distinct from middle class. Also important is the middle class fascination by these writers with what they see as a working class sport, not just a working class sport but one which is associated with working class life, in particular male working class life.

### **Body capital**

Wacquant developed his theory on body capital in the context of his ethnographic study on boxing (1992 and 2004). He was strongly influenced by Bourdieu’s concept of learning through the body (Wacquant 2004:viii). This means that development of and engagement with the body in purposeful activity can lead to learning or self-improvement. It also is important to acknowledge the societal influence, which can influence and possibly enhance



this process. Specifically this is the boxer's use of his body, which he plies as his trade. Body capital, within the context of boxing, is for Wacquant central to the trade or art of the boxer. Boxing he argues exists only in action (Wacquant, 2004: 68). For him, the body is both the tool of boxing and its target (p 147). Body capital is something which the boxer must develop to a very high degree, by protecting and developing his capital by the use of hand wraps, diet and particularly through engagement in fitness regimes. Importantly, Wacquant sees body capital as a commodity, which can be used (exploited) by others and one which is quite specific to boxing and not much use outside of the boxing situation:

“the specific capital he possesses is entirely embodied, and once it has been used, devoid of value in any other domain.” (Wacquant, 2004:59)

Wacquant (1995) makes the point that boxing is not just a mere activity, but necessitates a reinvention of the self. To use the body as “capital” requires a long and arduous training; he suggests 4 years to be an amateur and a further 3 years to become a competent professional. Wacquant argues that using the body as capital requires both acknowledgement of its limitations and detailed and dedicated training. It is this devotion to training that develops the body into a “fighting machine”. Engagement in such a training process requires a high degree of sacrifice, and Wacquant indicates three areas of life in which sacrifice can take place; diet, social/family relations and sexual activity. When following this argument Wacquant employs religious imagery. When describing the relationship of the boxer to his craft, he defines boxing as:

“a performance craft requiring sophisticated technical know how and an abiding moral commitment that will enable them not only to improve their moral order but also, and more urgently to construct a publicly recognised heroic self” (1995a:501).

He develops this imagery by emphasising the relationship with a trainer is all important, the trainer becomes a surrogate father (for example Mike Tyson and Cus d'Amato; Prince Naseem and Brendan Ingles). This has clear similarities with the novice and the novice master in religious communities. Further similarities are the control over the body, subjection of the will, all of which are a direct part of the training process and again are part of serious commitment to a religion. Interestingly, Wacquant (1998a) found that boxers abstained from sexual activity weeks before a fight although there is no (research) evidence to suggest that it increases the boxer's effectiveness, and it argued it was part of the overall quasi-religious significance of the boxer's training. The end result is a feeling of control / confidence and “a transcendent, moral, masculine self”, which will stand up in the ring (1998a: 345).

Wacquant (1998) also outlines some important contradictions in boxing, specifically: boxing deep down is repugnant to boxers and trainers, the end result of the trade is bodily deterioration and possible mental deterioration (1998) and lastly, in professional boxing matches: death is always a possibility (1995). Oates (1987) develops this darker side of boxing.

## Critique

Wacquant's work (1992,1995,1995a,1998,1998a,2001,2004) is both detailed and rigorous. In his ethnographic study he has identified and developed the notion of body capital within the context of boxing. Sugden (1987, 1996) also provides valuable insights into the development of capital within the context of boxing. Sugden was not writing in the tradition of Bourdieu but he does, nevertheless, add considerably to my understanding of body capital.

Whilst it is neither strictly true nor fair to state that both Wacquant and Sugden focused totally on organisational aspects to the exclusion of the individual perspective, they did emphasise the structure of processes of the gym, and did not focus so much on what meaning this had for the individual boxer and trainer. It would have been interesting and useful to have focus on meaning and individual negotiation.

An example of this is that a detailed examination of the individual within the context of boxing would have shed light on the point Wacquant makes about the quasi-religious aspects of boxing. He argues that in preparation for the boxing match the boxer enters a quasi-religious type state and commits himself in a way similar to the young man preparing to take religious vows. The images he creates are powerful and demonstrates the point he is trying to make. However, the commitment and dedication is temporary and is not a permanent state: after the boxing match the boxer will revert to his old habits and will almost certainly take up his sex life again. This is quite an important distinction.

Wacquant states that his boxers had a higher degree of social organisation and education than their neighbours, and he recognises, indeed it is a central theme of this work, and that one's position in society can be disadvantageous. It would seem that the habitus of some is such that they are almost trapped within their particular position, and cannot see a way out. Others who have developed a degree of capital and through this capital can take advantage of external opportunities such as boxing.

Wacquant writes very firmly within the tradition of Bourdieu: to the extent that he assumes the reader will understand the specific terminology, he introduces terms such as "habitus" and "field" without really explaining or analysing his use of these terms. He describes the boxing match as habitus meets field (Wacquant, 1992:246). However, while the boxer is clearly



socialised into a particular culture and develops very specific skills, how much of this actually alters his habitus is unclear from reading Wacquant. Habitus is dependent on one's class position and it is debatable how much is altered through education and exposure to other areas, especially when one considers the argument that certainly for Wacquant his boxers were generally better educated than their peers in the ghetto. An explicit consideration of this issue would have shed much light on the issue.

Body capital cannot be seen in isolation from other types of capital and it would seem that one can tentatively conclude that a degree of cultural capital is required, in that according to Wacquant, a degree of social organisation is found in boxers which is greater than their neighbours and whilst from an impoverished background are by no means members of the underclass. An explicit consideration of the ways in which capital developed through boxing interacts with other types of capital would be useful.

Wacquant and Sugden also emphasise the exploitative nature of body capital, the argument being the promoters and managers take this capital and use it for their own gain. Once this capital is spent (mainly by others) the boxer has nothing further to offer and his skills are not transferable. Again, a stronger focus on the individual experience may have enhanced and further developed this particular theory. What about the people who do not go on to become professional boxers, those who leave the sport at an early stage, or do not progress beyond amateur status? A study involving a broader overview would add much to our knowledge of this issue

Wacquant's work and his findings are replicated in other studies, notably Sugden (1987) and the journalistic/biographical accounts. His and the other studies by definition of ethnography focused on one particular area or setting. Comparison over a number of settings would have been useful. Sugden (1996) did do this with his comparative studies in boxing gyms, in Northern Ireland and Cuba.

## Summary

The recurring themes in the literature are around the interaction of the sport with society. Clearly, boxing as a sport does not exist in a vacuum and the ways in which it is viewed by society is an important dimension, when trying to understand and grapple with the sport. Dunning and Elais (1986) argue that society as it progresses becomes increasingly more civilised, whilst this may be arguable, at least superficially certain things are not tolerated by a civilised society. Sheard (1997) develops this argument and states that sports are often "sanitised" which makes them more palatable and acceptable.

The two major academic studies in the area are those of Sugden and Wacquant both of who were explicitly ethnographic in their approach. By

definition they both focus on a narrow area (inevitable in ethnography) and their findings are similar to each other's and are, additionally, reflected in the literature. However, a broader focus looking at more than one area of boxing may be helpful and through comparison may give additional insights.

Sugden and Wacquant both explore boxing from a sociological stance. For them boxing is firmly located in the working classes and in the ghetto specifically (at least in the U.S.). Confirming earlier studies, like those of Weinberg and Arond, it seems that boxing can be seen as a way of working class young males bettering themselves and getting out of the ghetto. Wacquant makes the point generally people taking up boxing are not from the lowest stratum of society and that a degree of organisation and dedication are essential. Wacquant (1992) suggests that these are not usually qualities found in the very lowest sections of society.

Sugden is particularly interested in the social structure and organisation of professional boxing. He maintains that boxing clubs are useful ways of keeping boys in deprived areas out of trouble. This can give a focus and direction which otherwise may be missing from their lives. However, while the organisers and trainers see this as an important part of their role, it also provides a fertile ground for potential professional fighters. However, it must be emphasised that not all potential boxers achieve professional status, even those who are very good and the gym does serve a positive function. He indicated that under a guise of altruism there is ruthless exploitation, yet motives are complex and wanting to make money is not mutually exclusive from wanting to help others.

Wacquant develops the concept of body capital. Superficially this can mean the development of the body as a way of making money, or improving the life chances of the individual. However, Wacquant is quite explicit in that he states that body capital is used by others, that is body capital of one may be taken and then used by another to make money. Sugden also makes this point. The boxer has skills and money making potential which managers, trainers and promoters use to their financial enhancement. Both Sugden and Wacquant draw parallels with prostitution to describe this phenomenon.

Social class is a continual theme in the literature, at times very explicitly developed. The key studies by Wacquant and Sugden acknowledge the class dimension and see boxing (in the US) as an activity undertaken in the ghettos. Weinberg and Arond (1952) and Hare (1971) see boxing as an activity undertaken by those in the lower strata of society. Weinberg and Arond do highlight the ways in which different ethnic groups engage in boxing and as they move up the social scale they become less well represented. For example, Italian replaced the Jews in early twentieth century USA. Boxing may be a highly individual sport but one's position in society seems to be a way of determining how one participates. Body capital is, therefore, a useful



conceptual framework on which the particular aspect of boxing and social class may be explored.

Table 2 Summary of key themes from the literature

Appeal of boxing is going for the knock out punch that gives boxing its force & appeal. Perhaps appeals to a primal urge in the spectator	Sugden Oates
Boxing is linked, to the ghetto, yet only a proportion of people make it	Wacquant Sugden
Boxing is seen as a way out of the ghetto and yet after boxing career is spent there is little left for the boxer	Weinberg and Around Wacquant
Boxing is hard work & develops the work ethic	Sugden Anasi
Belief that boxing is a way of keeping young men off the streets	Explicit or implicit in all the writers
Boxing: "relation of expression & exploitation by hiding them under the cloak of nature, benevolence and meritocracy" (Wacquant 1993:2)	Wacquant Sugden
Boxing is control by wealthy people who use it as a means of making money through the labour of its workers	Sugden Wacquant
As society becomes increasingly civilised sports involving physical violence are no longer tolerated and have to be "toned down". This applies to boxing , thus use of gloves, head guards	Elais & Dunning Sheard

In the literature review two distinct sources were considered, work from a predominantly educational source which considered the practicalities and philosophies of life long learning and predominantly sociological literature on boxing. Whilst disparate the notion of capital (in the sense used by Bourdieu) served as a link between the two areas. A recurrent theme was the ways in

which people used education/ boxing to better their lot in life, this was a recurrent theme throughout the research study. At some level people took something up boxing or say a night class to improve their lot, this could range from making friends to finding a new structure and direction in life. This is a notion which will be developed throughout this thesis.



# Chapter Three

## Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter will consider the methodology which structured this study on boxing. It will commence by outlining the theoretical and methodological principles on which the study was based. It will then focus on the specific techniques and method of analysis and will conclude by considering the ethical issues and the ways in which reliability and validity were addressed.

### Theoretical Principles

Research is broadly divided into qualitative and quantitative approaches. To put it simply, quantitative involves numbers and attempts to count or quantify and qualitative explores meaning or subjective experience of the participants. However, in the design of the study involving the investigation of a social phenomenon or situation the researcher has to make a decision as to the type of data he or she wishes to explore and to develop, which will be data which can in some way be quantified or data which will be amenable to qualitative analysis. On some occasions, both types may be collected.

Mason (2003) states that the researcher must initially determine their ontological and epistemological stance and this will determine the broad research approach. Clearly, a research design should be congruent with the basic philosophical orientation of the study. In this particular study, the design and orientation are quite explicitly influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu; the reasons being that Bourdieu strongly emphasises the interplay between the objective and the subjective, or more specifically, I was attracted by his emphasis on the ways in which individuals interact (or construct their world) against the objective structures of society.

In technical terms, the particular focus of this study was a concern with the interaction of capital with the wider development of the individual. Capital is an idea, which has a societal, as well as individual reference and Bourdieu's work therefore seemed to be an excellent starting point. The ontological stance can be said to be broadly a constructionist approach, after Bourdieu, in that the individual constructs his/ her identity against the objective structures of society. Bourdieu does not view social structures as fixed and immobile but rather as constructs devised at a particular point in time that are collectively constructed, can change over time and importantly can structure the habitus of the individual.

Epistemologically, the methodology should be congruent with the ontological stance and should follow the thinking of Bourdieu, who wrote extensively on

the subject of methods of inquiry. He was not committed to any one approach but rather is concerned with methodological approaches to solving practical or societal problems and of capturing the individual experience against the backdrop of society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) highlights some methodological principles which should be followed in the design of a research study: the method must be capable of solving particular social issues or problems, it should be able to capture both the subjective and objective experience and should link to theory in a meaningful way. Bourdieu decries the use of methodologies for their own sake but rather methodologies should be linked and developed against specific social problems. In other words, the methods should fit the problem.

Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) also emphasises the principle of reflexivity but in doing so he goes much further than other writers. It is important not just to consider the effect the personal characteristics of the researcher may have on the design and outcomes of the study i.e. the gender, social class and ethnicity of the researcher, but also the position of the researcher in the academic world should be considered. He also argues that the particular disciplinary bias of the researcher and the academic microcosm which he or she is attached should also be accounted. Or as Bourdieu puts it, the epistemological unconscious must be unearthed. These principles were considered in the study's design and are addressed later in this chapter when the issues of reflexivity are considered.

It would thus seem that it is sufficient to state that Bourdieu and Wacquant's ideas on the development of capital are explored within the context of sport and specifically amateur and professional boxing. It is, thus, an attempt to identify the ways in which the habitus interacts with the 'objective' structures of society, and how it can enhance peoples' lives (or detract from their lives): or more specifically can lead to the development of other types of capital.

Implicit in all research is the concept of theory. To simplify the divide, quantitative approaches are thought to test theory; qualitative approaches are thought to generate the theory from data (Smith, 1975). In the context of this study this idea gives rise to some interesting questions: the theoretical position is quite explicitly stated and concepts used are those of Bourdieu. Is this an attempt to test the theories he purports? In a sense the answer is: 'Yes, it is '. However, an important aspect of Bourdieu's position is his very strong emphasis that the theoretical aspects of his work can only be developed and explored through the empirical. Therefore, one can conclude that the approach should be an attempt to generate theory from the practical situation. However, neither of these positions is quite satisfactory. A specific theoretical approach is being followed which may lead to the generation of



some insights but is this the same as the development of theory? Secondly how easy is it to test the concepts of habitus, field and capital? Especially if one considers Bourdieu's outline of his methodological approach in his 1996 paper "Understanding", where he emphasises the importance of getting into the subject's world and seeing things through their eyes.

For Bourdieu, an important aspect of research is to attempt to ascertain the individual actor's views and their experiences which will then allow a detailed understanding of the individual actor's development against their ways of exploring and looking at their particular world. To put it in Bourdieu's terminology: a central concern is the articulation of their habitus and its development against the development of capital. The methodology must, therefore, be appropriate to this concern.

The design is certainly not a testing of the theory in a formal quantitative sense. It is closer to the sense of theory generation but, perhaps, more accurately it is a development of theoretical concepts through their application to a particular setting and the people involved in that situation. Mason (2003) suggests that an approach to research can be a continual interplay between the research process, in all stages and the theoretical issues. Therefore this study is about application of a theoretical approach which will add understanding of a phenomenon as well as identifying some of the wider issues. A qualitative approach was therefore selected as an appropriate approach on which this study could be developed.

### **Methodological principles**

In the past twenty or so years, qualitative research has undergone a significant development, and has become increasingly popular and recognised as a valid method of inquiry. There are several approaches which one could take to a qualitative research study, specifically, Grounded Theory, Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology and Ethnography are the key formal approaches.

Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is primarily concerned with the generation of theory from empirical data. It was subsequently developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and follows a very focused and specific framework.

Phenomenological approaches are concerned with the "lived experience" of the individual and are focused on determining and reporting experiences of the research subjects, often around a particular theme or issue. For example, "hope" or "sleep". Another example of this approach is the work of Charlesworth (2000) who carried out a phenomenological study whereby he explored the experience of working class people in Rotherham.

Ethnomethodological approaches are concerned with the minutiae of detail usually around social interactions. Through investigating such interactions, the researcher determines rules by which interactions are uncovered and hopes to determine the broader social forces underpinning these interactional rules.

Ethnography is concerned with the investigation of a specific culture or subculture and the particular role of the ethnographer is to make intelligible to others the social organization and meaning of the particular rules and regulations of that spectrum of society.

Whilst it is not as clear-cut or focused as quantitative approaches, each school or approach has a particular methodological approach. Morse (1991) and Baker et al (1991) warn against what they call "methodological slurring", that is a research study should consistently follow one approach. However, there is another viewpoint which welcomes an eclectic approach. An example of this is the view that a mix of methods enhances each other. It is suggested, for example, that grounded theory can do much to enhance and augment ethnography (Bearman, 2005)

The underlying approach of this study is that of Bourdieu and his theories. In Bourdieu there are clear phenomenological concerns, in that he is interested in the lived experience of individuals. Yet, Bourdieu, in much of his work is specifically ethnographic, for example his anthropological studies in Algeria were specifically ethnographic. A decision was made at the outset of this study that it was important to explore and develop the theories of Bourdieu and in particular his theories on capital. Accordingly the principles of qualitative research will be followed, as opposed to focusing on a specific qualitative framework.

Bourdieu is thought to provide a methodical rather than a theoretical framework (Fowler, 1996), In his paper 'Understanding', Bourdieu (1996) highlights principles of the research process, and the need to enter and understand the world of those being studied. Therefore in developing a theoretical framework based on the work of Bourdieu it is important to follow his theoretical outlines when dealing with research design. He quite explicitly outlined approaches to the collection of data, of central concern is that studies should be problem focused. All his studies were focused on a particular problem. Bourdieu states, that for him logic of research is 'inseparably methodological and theoretical' (as cited by Webb, 2002 p.48). Central to his thinking is the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, habitus is a means of conceptualizing and combining these two dimensions. Whilst, not dismissive of the different approaches to research (qualitative and quantitative) Bourdieu does not place great emphasis on the quantification of social phenomenon but rather emphasizes the importance of entering and understanding the world of his subjects.



## Design of the study.

When planning the design of this study, the research questions were very much to the fore, and a clear design was selected which would focus and develop these questions. It seemed essential to focus and discuss with individuals their perceptions; the so-called qualitative interview seemed to be the most appropriate approach as the purpose of the interview is to obtain the perception and views of the individual about particular phenomenon (Kwale, 1996). Kwale goes on to outline some of the key principles of such an approach: unlike interviews involving a questionnaire where a fixed number of questions are asked in a similar manner to a defined group, qualitative interviews involve a fluid and flexible approach commonly described as a conversation with a purpose.

To return to Bourdieu's terminology, it seemed while the qualitative interviews are an excellent way of getting in touch with habitus and field, it is also a feature of his work was that habitus and field are an interplay of the subjective and objective. It seemed that another approach was required to identify some of the structures that involved the identification of field. It was decided to undertake some observation of boxing situations, specifically boxing gyms and boxing situations

Observation as a data collection method is clearly part of the ethnographic tradition and therefore was appropriate as a means of developing the study. The central aim was to explore the world of boxing and determining ways in which specific skills could enhance and develop the individuals, or, to put it in Bourdieu's terminology, the ways in which their cultural capital could be enhanced. It therefore seemed to be an appropriate way of developing the model. Broadly speaking, observation can be participant or non-participant. I decided that participant observation would allow me to blend in with the setting and I would not stand out or be obtrusive.

I fairly rapidly decided I was too old to engage in actual boxing. However I needed to appreciate the skill of boxing and for this reason took up boxing lessons. I joined a boxing gym and engaged in hitting punch bags and pads. I also engaged in associated activities such as floor work and other types of exercises. I engaged in what could be termed light sparring and whilst I did not gain a full appreciation of boxing I did gain many valuable insights. I also attended boxing matches all of which I regarded as fieldwork and I used these situation to consider my emergent categories and to collect supporting data. Additionally, I was given the opportunity of partaking in a course which prepared me to become a "boxing judge"<sup>6</sup>. This experience proved to be invaluable both as an excellent opportunity for fieldwork and it also enabled me to familiarise myself with the rules and regulations of boxing

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<sup>6</sup> That is someone who scores boxing matches; at any one match there are 3 to 5 judges.

Bourdieu's principle of reflexivity was also an important consideration in the research design (Bourdieu, 1996; Webb et al, 2002). Attention to this issue would ensure that the research would (as far as possible) remain objective. Additionally, it would also allow a consideration of the ethical dimension and would allow a critical reflexivity to be maintained, through a continual exploration of the interaction of the researcher and his or her data. The researcher must acknowledge his or her standpoint, and as far as is possible not working from a pre-determined framework. Webb et al, (2002) summarise Bourdieu's five issues which, they argue, should be used to facilitate reflexivity in research:

1. There is a need to make explicit procedures involved in the study
2. There is a need to clarify limitations to the study
3. It must acknowledge that transcripts are limited in that much is edited i.e. non-verbal, inflexion in voice.
4. Researchers need to have some of the history of their research subject.
5. Researchers should be value free (Webb et al, 2002: 55 -56).

These principles reinforced the need to undertake fairly detailed interviews and objectives. They also, to my mind, reinforced the need for observation, but observation which included a record of my thoughts and feelings around the situation as well as an objective viewpoint.

Mason (2003) outlines interesting reasons for the collection of data that can be collected in a research study namely: literal, interpretative and reflexive data. By literal she means data on which the analysis or reason for collection of the data is focused on the form or context of the data. Interpretative is where the researcher makes an attempt to understand the issues beyond the literal meaning or interpretation. Reflexive means the ways in which the interaction of the researcher can shape and influence the research study and the researcher is consciously aware of this and records his or her perceptions as part of the data collection strategy.

The central issue or question of this study was the concept of capital, specifically the ways in which body capital interacts with other forms and types of capital, as developed within the context of professional and amateur boxing. Using the concepts of capital is a way of conceptualising familiar phenomenon, but the terminology is unfamiliar to the majority of the respondents as indeed were some of the concepts involved in capital. The research questions almost insisted on an interpretative approach. The principles of investigation as developed by Bourdieu included the importance of the researcher gaining an appreciation of the "rules and conditions" of the field of the study (de Cerleau, 1984). Additionally, Bourdieu (1996) strongly emphasises the need for the researcher to gain an understanding of the participant's world from his or her viewpoint.



## Interviews

This particular stance informed the design and structure of the interview. Questions were focused around the experience of the interviewees and they were encouraged to develop their thinking and ideas around boxing. Additional questions were asked which enable a deeper understanding of the rules and organisation of boxing. A rapport was essential between the researcher and those interviewed.

In the literature around qualitative interviews, there is much on the ways in which differences and similarities in power and gender can influence the direction and context of the interview (e.g. Oakley, 1997). Authors such as Arendell (2000) and McCorkel and Myers (2003), writing from a feminist stance, emphasise the importance of acknowledging differences in the position of the interviewer and those being interviewed, although the differences can be both subtle and complex. In any research study the relationship of the researcher and his or her subjects is not that of equals; Bourdieu (1996) acknowledges this. He advocates the training of people from similar situations to the respondents. They could collect the data, the argument being people would discuss issues with more freedom.

The less the distance between researcher and informant the more successful the interaction, as Bourdieu (1996:8) states:

The 'market of linguistic and symbolic goods' set up at each interview varies in structure according to the objective relationship.

A relationship should be that of 'active and methodical listening' and ideally the two parties should have a shared reality that is they should be from the same groups. Bourdieu maintains that questions are less likely to be threatening if they seem to arise from a shared reality. In this study, all the respondents were male, and as I am also male, there was a commonality of understanding and experience. Certainly there was a difference of educational and boxing experience. Although I never boxed, nor could at this point in time have engaged in a boxing career, potentially I could have been a boxer and this created a degree of equality. The issue of social class was perhaps more complex and difficult to grapple with. One could assume that as a university lecturer I am middle class and those involved in boxing were working class. While this was in many instances true, it often was "not really". With some respondents there was a difference in social class, but respondents were chosen for their ability to articulate and discuss and this did not seem to be a particular issue.

Associated with the interviews was a period of observation which helped me gain a degree of understanding which I could bring to the interviews, further creating a feeling of equality. It was also noticeable that conversation

continued after the formal interviews and I thought this indicated a degree of relaxation and freedom.

As far as possible, interviews were conducted in a spirit of equality, in which I could build an empathy and understanding with the respondents. This was important, particular as I wished to develop an "interpretative understanding" of the data. It was important to develop an understanding of capital within the experience of those being interviewed. Although the focus was on boxing, the discussion also widened to include a discussion on other areas of people's lives. Moving from the very specific to the more personal allowed a degree of familiarity and relaxation.

Interviews can be described as structured, semi-structured and unstructured. At one end of the continuum is the highly structured questionnaire in which fixed questions are asked under fixed conditions and the answers are quantified. At the other end of the continuum is the entirely unstructured interview. In this study the interviews were near the entirely unstructured end of the continuum. There were a number of areas, which were explored and as themes emerged the questions became more focused, but at no time were the questions asked in a fixed determinate manner but rather themes and ideas were explored and developed.

The principle of reflexivity was an important consideration; that was addressed by a continual reflection on the interviews and also through the detailed field notes which were collected as part of the study. The use of other colleagues to check and verify the coding procedures also raised questions, which add to the reflexivity.

## Observation

To provide triangulation observations were undertaken as an essential part of the study. Interviews were an excellent means of identifying the meanings boxing had for individuals. Observations allowed categories or issues emerging from the interviews to be explored and developed in a real world setting. Mason (2003) argues that it is important to identify the epistemological and ontological reasons for an observational study. This allows observations to be focused and will identify the particular type of data which will be emergent. To return to the central concepts of habitus and field and whilst the reality is slightly more complex, observations could enhance ideas on habitus and interviews would develop perceptions and notions of environment (field).

Sugden (1987, 1996) and Wacquant (1992, 2004) in particular carried out ethnographic studies and by definition focused on particular settings. This research did not focus on one particular setting, but used observational techniques of three areas (and also used interviews settings as a means of



collecting data). Through contrasting and comparing these situations a detailed understanding of the phenomenon emerged. An understanding, which may not have happened, had one explored one area in detail (in effect this was Glaser & Strauss' (1967) principle of constant comparison).

Mason (2003) poses the question: is observation collecting or generating data? The participant nature of the researcher in the data could influence much of the interaction but I did not direct or shape any of the activities but rather engaged in them, although clearly my presence would influence the interaction but I did not take a lead or direct. I therefore concluded that my observations were about collecting data. However, it was more than describing data as the process also related to the theories of Bourdieu to the data.

Generally, the principal approach to observation was by participant observation, which in practice meant that I participated in all of the activities and therefore can be described as a participant observer. The observation was structured in the following manner: the interviews were usually conducted in a practitioner setting, usually a gym and field notes were taken to monitor the environment, the interaction and reaction of both the interviewee and other workers. The observational settings are discussed later in this chapter. They were mainly undertaken in one key setting and in two other settings; all were fairly structured boxing training. The observations lead to my training as an Amateur Boxing Association official and in turn this necessitated attendance at a number of tournaments, which was a source of data. This allowed constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 and Strauss and Corbin, 1990), a useful technique that allowed similarities and differences to be explored which in turn led to a fuller exploration of categories. I recorded all aspects of these settings, which included my own reactions. Additionally, I participated in boxing, which included some light sparring and learning how to punch and defend. This provided a valuable insight. I also attended keep fit sessions in a boxing gym and this lead to many valuable insights both from participation and interaction with the other members. Detailed field notes were maintained, which as well as providing a record of activity, also facilitated the process of reflexivity

## Analysis

Whilst the aim of qualitative research is not necessarily to produce a reproducible study, it is nevertheless important that the analysis is transparent and the researcher makes transparent and logical decisions about the coding mechanisms which are involved. The interviews produced a series of categories, which were gradually refined and developed through interviews, and were checked out with the respondents as the interviews progressed. Additionally, the coding and categories identified were 'checked' by two people with knowledge of the subject. To undertake this task I selected

colleagues who had familiarity both with the research process and had some insight (if not detailed knowledge) of the subject area. They found the coding logical and consistent.

Mason (2003) also suggests that the analysis should follow the ontological and epistemological stance of the investigator. Bourdieu wrote fairly extensively on method and methodological approaches to research and emphasised the importance of reflexivity. The data therefore, required an interpretation against the theories of Bourdieu, as well as a description or outline of the particular categories. Additionally, as reflexivity is central to his methodological approach it is also important to consider the part the researcher played in the generation of data and the creation of theories. There were three levels of analysis, the descriptive, a consideration against Bourdieu's theories and the reflexive aspect.

It was important to consider the mechanics of the data both from the interviews and the observational material. The data clearly has to be organised into a systematic framework with themes and concepts being gathered together in a logical and transparent manner. This process of categorisation is common to most qualitative approaches; specifically it is the process whereby the investigator applies consistently and logically a set of principles to the analysis of the data (Mason, 2002). Many writers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 Miles & Huberman, 1994) also suggest that patterns or relationships between the categories should be identified and clearly established. These relationships can be either casual or relational, depending on the research question.

The process of analysis consisted of a verbatim transcription of the interviews and recording of the field notes, this material was read several times and chunks of natural meaning were established, which were categorized and coded. A decision was made to establish categories not on the basis on the minutiae of detail, but rather on the expression of concepts or ideas of the respondents. This was fully in keeping with the general thrust of approach to the study, which specifically was concerned with examining the habitus and field (and capital) of those being studied.

The key issue in the analysis of qualitative data can be reduced to the need to categorise and organise, and the need to find some sort of relationship between these categories, not necessarily a casual link but an interdependence between each of the categories. This lifts the research to the level of explanation (Mays & Pope, 1995). Kvale (1995) refers to this as narrative and interpretation that is establishing the story line and seeing beyond the superficial. Identifying linkage between the categories was problematic. Whilst this could be established from close reading of the interview transcripts and the field notes, a structure of framework was thought to be essential to uncover this framework or relationships. Miles & Huberman,



(1994) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) are good examples of writers who address structures and approaches that facilitate the analysis of data; both are very specific in ways in which this type of analysis can be developed. It seemed that a structure or framework against which the data could be analysed was essential, but it needed to be one which was in keeping with the broad design of the study.

A variety of approaches were considered, but none seemed to be totally in keeping with the aims and philosophical underpinnings of the study. For example, Strauss and Corbin emphasised social forces and were concerned with an examination of dimensions and properties of the data against a background of context, conditions, processes and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This model seemed to be unduly complex and was developed from a symbolic interactionist perspective, which was not the focus of the study. Donobedian, (1986) provides a useful framework for the assessment of quality in health care settings: structure; process and outcomes. This framework, provides a suitable structure for this study. Although it was not a neat fit of habitus and structure, field and process and capital and outcomes, there were some clear parallels. The analysis (Chapter 4) has used structure, process and field framework and the discussion (Chapter 5) has broadened to habitus, capital and field. Figure 4, illustrates the process.

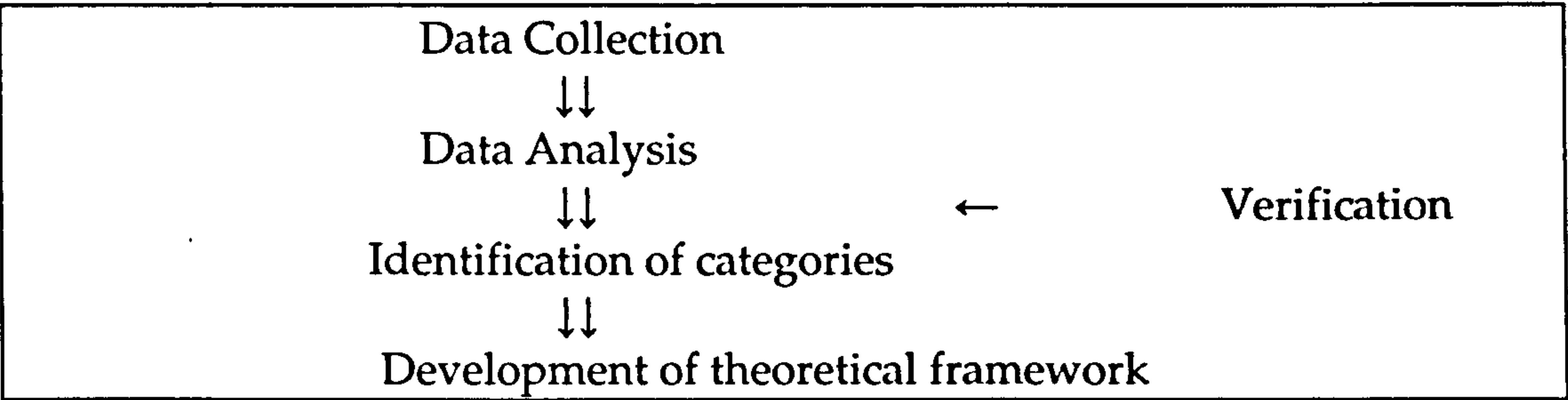


Figure 4 Representation of the process of data analysis.

**Ethical Issues**

The British Research Association Ethical Guidelines (2004) were followed throughout the study. Before each interview the participants were given information about the study and were asked to complete a consent form. Additionally they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and were given transcripts of the interviews. Anonymity was ensured at all times; although many of the respondents did clearly state that they were happy to have their name associated with their views. In the report names and details were changed. However as class position and jobs were an important feature the details were not changed in such a way that would distort the data; for example, whilst a boxing trainer would be presented as a boxing trainer his name and biographical details would be altered.

In keeping with the principle of doing the respondent no harm, questions were focused on the aim of the study and unrelated personal areas were not addressed. If a respondent found any area too emotionally sensitive this tact would have been changed, although in practice this did not happen.

Participants in the observational settings were informed of the research and its broad aims. The general descriptions of the areas and activities, outlined, are (broadly speaking) in the public domain; conversations are less certain. They lacked the intensity of a one-to-one interview and clearly permission could not be gained before every conversation and sometimes overheard remarks. Comments were recorded and included in the report if they were thought to add to the overall thrust of the study. If the comment was fairly general and typical, permission was not sought but if the comment was unique and represented an individual viewpoint or insight, permission was gained from the source, before it was reported.

## Sample

Boxing is a highly stratified and organised activity. Whilst people are involved both in both amateur and professional boxing, many consider them as two quite different sports. Most professional boxers have an established track record as amateurs; many amateurs remain as amateurs without entering the professional ranks. Additionally, in the past five years or so, many are undergoing boxing training as a way of keeping fit (boxing circuits, boxercise). In the USA, and more recently in the United Kingdom 'white collar' boxing has arisen, this means that middle class men, and sometimes women, are participating in the sport. Whilst boxing is a highly organised activity, there are unlicensed fights taking place that is fights outside the realms of the ABA and British Boxing Board of Control. Another recent phenomenon is the growth of women's boxing, which certainly in the past five years has greatly increased.

In view of the range and types of activity a decision clearly had to be made as to whether the focus should be on the traditional type of boxing that is licensed amateur and professional boxing as a male sport or to include women and / or unlicensed boxing. It was decided to focus on the traditional focus of boxing; that is young men in the amateur and professional ranks. The rationale being whilst an understanding could be gained of any of these groups, it is such an under investigated area that an appreciation should firstly be gained of the standard groups before gaining an appreciation of the so-called sub-categories.

An important principle of the analysis was that of constant comparison, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) whereby data was organised for the purpose of comparison. At an early stage in the organisation of the study I decided that the experience of amateur as opposed to that of professional boxers, and that



of working and middle—class participation in the sport would allow a comparison of data. This comparison allowed an explanatory as opposed to a descriptive focus to be followed.

The key principle in selection of interviewees was people who could accurately conceptualise what boxing was about, what it meant to them. In particular how they could articulate the process of skill development and the ways in which the development of the skill could enhance their lives and lead to other educational opportunities. Morse (1991) maintains that the key principle in formulating any sample frame for a qualitative study should be appropriateness and adequacy. Appropriateness of a sample meaning the informants should be able to provide information which will meet the needs of the study. Adequacy meaning the sample selected should provide adequate quantity of data. She went on to state that the qualities of the informants should be that they are knowledgeable about the topic, able to critically evaluate, willing to share and to give of their time.

Another, perhaps equally important principle which was followed was the conceptual framework on which the study was based. Concepts from Bourdieu's thinking was explicit in the design of the study and major purpose of the interviews was to gain an appreciation of the habitus and field of the boxer as well as to explore the ways in which participation in boxing could develop capital. It would, therefore, have been inappropriate to limit the sample to say amateur or professional boxers: rather a range of people involved in boxing were selected on the basis of how the best could inform the study.

The principle of theoretical sampling was followed; that is as categories or ideas began to emerge people (and situations) were sought who could develop this category either in terms of comparison or providing some specific information or insights. Initial interviews were held with two people (Gary and Dan), two men who were involved with boxing. They acted as key respondents and put me in touch with other boxers and coaches. Whilst the sample was not stratified in the way in which a study following an experimental design would be stratified, two dimensions, of the sample of people interviewed, which emerged were social class, and amateur and professional boxing.

Social class is a complex phenomenon and whilst I was aware of the literature outlining links between class and participation in types of sport, I did not see it as particularly important issue in the study's design. In the initial selection of the informants my main concern was their ability to represent boxing and also to articulate the important issues (as suggested by Morse (1991)). As the analysis took place, simultaneously, with the data collection it became very apparent that class was an important issue.

Class can be a difficult concept to operationalise, the registrar general’s social scale has seven classes, as illustrated in table 3:

1	Professional etc occupations
11	Managerial and technical occupations
111N	Skilled non-manual occupations1
111M	Skilled manual occupations
1V	Partly-skilled occupations
V	Unskilled occupations
V1	Armed forces

Table 3 Registrar General’s Social Class System

I took middle class to be those involved in non-manual occupations and working class those involved in manual occupations. There is some suggestion that social class is not only about occupation but also reflects values and attitudes (Goldthorpe and Lockwood et al, 1968), the central focus of this study was an investigation of the ways in which capital could be develop through participation in boxing, the perceptions and experience of individuals was of interest to me. For this reason, rather than attempt any ways of identifying working class attitudes I went with the registrar generals’ classification. I allowed ideas and issues to emerge from the data and its analysis. The important factor was to ensure representation so as to facilitate the process of constant comparison.

The principle of constant comparison was important, in guiding and directing the focus of both observation and the interviews. Constant comparison is a methodological technique developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), whilst this study did not follow a grounded theory approach, this technique nevertheless was deemed to be useful. In practice it meant comparing and contrasting different people or situations, as categories emerged from the analysis of the research data they could be contrasted by exploring the ways they affected different people or situations I therefore was conscious of the class position of my respondents and in addition to their other attributes I also choose them for their particular social class, and as well informing me on boxing they could also offer a class perspective on the particular issues.

The observational settings were primarily selected because of the range of activities and the ways in which my engagement could be facilitated. Of course, as the interviews progressed I became increasing sensitised to the issues of class: my main observational sites were the fight club and the boxing class ran by Dan in a health club. These were respectively working and middle class settings. The third observational site the “Boxing Academy” was focused on for quite different reasons, primarily around the skills development of boxing and did not add much to my analysis of class.



The observational sites were primarily amateur or white collar, but the “ Fight club” was used by a number of professional boxers and in the context of my interviews I interviewed a number of professional boxers and I treated the interview sites as sources of observational data. Detail of the observational sites and a break down of the respondents and their class follows.

The following people participated in interviews, pseudonyms have been used and details have been changed.

Gary, aged 38, was in his boyhood an amateur boxer (of no great shakes) at present he is working as a probation officer and is life long fan of boxing. Interviewed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002

Dan, aged 23, again an ex-amateur, in his boyhood. Is a keen fan of boxing and although is not engaging in the sport, he teaches boxing techniques as keep-fit. Interviewed 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2002

John, aged 37, is a full-time boxing coach, working in a highly profession environment. Interviewed 6<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Fred, aged 52, was a senior colleague of John, working in the same environment. Interviewed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Terry, aged 52, a professional trainer and promoter, runs a “corner-shop” and has a gym build behind his shop. He was in a much rougher and ready type of environment. Interviewed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Rick, aged 22, is a professional boxer, he left university after completing his second year to concentrate on boxing. At the time of interview he was at a fairly early stage of his professional career and had only taken part in two fights. He was an experienced amateur. Interviewed 15<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Mike, aged 29 is a keen boxing fan who is very knowledgeable and has attended a number of matches over the years. Interviewed 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002

Jack, aged 26, was recently married and worked in a bank. After his marriage he gave up a fairly successful amateur career. Interviewed 28<sup>th</sup> September 2002

George, aged 74, was an old time boxing coach of vast experience. In his time had seen some highly successful boxers move through his “stable” Interviewed 1<sup>st</sup> December 2002

Gerry, aged 54, was a highly successful entrepreneur businessman who as aside-line ran one or two professional boxers, as a promoter. Interviewed 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Darren, aged 50, was a medic, involved in a professional capacity interviewed 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2002.

Anthony, aged 30, recently retired from professional boxing, had a journeyman career and was one of Gary's boxers . Interviewed 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Ged, aged 43, was an ex-professional boxer of journeyman status, was at the time of interview a highly successful Trainer/ Promoter . His gym was the largest organisation I visited Interviewed 17<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Mark, aged 46, was an amateur trainer who ran an amateur club mainly for school boys. Interviewed 4<sup>th</sup> April 2003

Marty, aged 24, former amateur was a former amateur and is now a professional holding a minor world championship. Out of all the men interviewed he was, perhaps, the most stereotypical of all the boxers in that he was from a lower social class and was less articulate than the others. 25<sup>th</sup> March 2003

Al, aged 26, former amateur who was now a professional boxer. He had engaged in 2 professional fights and was on a "leave of absence". Interviewed 16<sup>th</sup> April 2003

Paul. Aged 22, is an amateur boxer and a medical student Interviewed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2003

Phil, aged 56, trainer/ promoter of long standing, he had a son who was very successful professional boxer Interviewed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2003



Table 4, provides a summary of the sample.

	Amateur	Professional	Working Class	Middle class
Gary				Social worker
Dan				Gym Instructor
John				Lecturer
Fred				Lecturer
Terry			Newsagent	
Rick				Graduate
Mike			Technician	
Darren				Doctor
Jack				Graphic designer
George			Retired miner	
Gerry				Business man
Anthony			Driver	
Ged			Entrepreneur	
Mark			Joiner	
Al			Gym instructor	
Marty			Bricklayer	
Paul				Student
Phil			Gym manager	

The shaded areas indicate status of the respondent

Table 4 Details of respondents

In identifying the respondents’ social class, it became apparent that occupation could not immediately classify people, for example gym instructor could mean anything from a worker in backstreet gym to a graduate coach. As part of the interview process I asked for interviewees’ highest educational qualification and father’s occupation which could act as indicators. So, for example, Dan had a good secondary education and was from professional parents, while Al was from traditional working class background and had left school at 16. It also must be emphasised that whilst this identification was useful, and reflected a range of involvement and class positions, it was only part of the study; the participant observation was also important. I was able



to explore both working and middle class settings, the settings of the health club and fight club were respectively predominantly middle and working class. As my involvement progressed, I attended a number of tournaments and shows in working men's clubs and visited boxing clubs, all of which could be described a working class.

Interviews were undertaken in social or semi-social settings – pubs or cafés or the interviews were held in gyms. John and Fred were coaches in a national centre. It was a well-equipped, large gymnasium, which had two large boxing rings. It was funded as a national training centre.

*George* ran a community gym which was situated in a stone built, cottage-like structure. It was fairly well equipped and had a room for weights and weight training, as well as a room for punch-bags and a boxing ring. It was situated in a council estate, on the periphery of the city. It was fairly well attended by boys and young men, some incredibly muscular and well built. It had a pleasant, friendly feel to it.

*Mark* ran a community boxing club based in a similar area to *George* (about 5 miles away). Unlike *George's* gym, this was a room in a community centre. Its age group was somewhat younger, consisting of boys around 12-15. He had a few older boxers, but the majority of his boxers were, as described by Sugden (1996), pre-pubescent and had still to encounter the realities of boxing. Very much based on impression, these boys seemed of a slightly higher social status than those at *George's* club. They seemed to be the sons of tradesmen and clerical workers. The sessions were structured in circuit training which involved a range of activities lasting 1-2 minutes, and finished with sparring.

The 'professionals' I visited in a variety of settings. *Gary and Anthony* I interviewed (separately) in *Gary's* business premises (he ran a successful firm). He told me he had a gym with a boxing ring but on the occasion I visited he had lost the key (!) so I did not see it. It was a fairly standard office-type premise.

*Terry and Rick's* interviews were held in rather more interesting settings. *Terry* was (and is) a publican and owns a public house in a deprived inner-city area. The pub seems to be moderately successful and fairly standard. To my amazement, built on to the pub was a large extension. It was not open to the public but was a small, but well-equipped boxing training facility. It was surrounded with pictures of boxers who had passed through this particular 'stable'. *Terry* was unpopular with the amateur clubs in the area who thought he poached the good amateurs and ruthlessly used them for his own financial rewards.

*Terry* also put on boxing shows – four times each year – which he held in a hotel. The shows included dinner, a comedian, and an after-dinner speaker,



concluding with the boxing. Audiences were about 95% male, mainly businessmen in dinner jackets. Gerry thought this the height of exploitation, although it did not significantly differ from amateur shows which I attended; other than Terry's boxers were being paid. As Ged stated:

"If you're going to be punched in the nose, you may as well be paid for it"

*Al* I arranged to meet in a café.

*Marty* invited me to his house. Marty had embarked on a successful professional career and his house – a council or an ex-council house – was clean and well furnished, improvements were clearly in the process of being undertaken. Interestingly, when I telephoned him he said on answering the phone, "Who the f\*\*\* is this?!" He was very apologetic when I explained, who I was and why I was telephoning. He had an English Bull Terrier and he was very surprised I was not afraid of this dog, which I think gave me some 'street cred'.

*Ged* operated a very successful gym. It was funded by the national lottery and was situated in a school in a community centre. It was large and spacious with a boxing ring. He had a variety of coaches and assistant coaches working for him, and had both amateur and professional boxers in his gym- it was serious. This is not to say the other settings were flippant, but the impression was the gym was formal, sessions were held early each evening and on Saturday mornings. It was well equipped, both in terms of equipment and personnel.

It was, like all the other settings, in a predominantly working-class area, and did seem to serve a social function, although the men using it were dedicated professionals. I visited only for the interview with Ged and would have been interested to see if it fitted the description of Sugdens' study in Hartford (Sugden, 1987), Connecticut. That is, the gym, whilst serving a social function, was also a farm for budding professionals.

*Phil* I interviewed in his gym. This was a boxing gym that dealt exclusively (at least the sessions I observed) with professional boxers. It was situated in a run-down urban neighbourhood; the area consisted mainly of warehouses. The club was run by a manager/trainer, and the sessions were extremely focused. About six young men would participate, and the trainer or his assistant conducted the sessions. His son was a world-class professional boxer and the gym was mainly a training ground for him, although other boxers were present. Phil was a youth worker and was formally involved with community work as well as running the gym. He was late in arriving for the interview; I was mistaken for a journalist and was allowed to observe the training session run by an assistant coach. It was almost "straight out of the

movies". The boxers were undertaking different activities. One was working with the trainer using pads; the others were shadow boxing, using punch-bags. There was an older man sweeping the floor and every so often he would stop and give the boxers a drink from a water-carrier. It had a very determined and focused air to it.

## Observational Settings

My main observational settings were focused in 3 areas. In total I undertook approximately 1000 hours of observation which was participative. In practice, this meant that I could freely interact with the people in the situation and could, therefore, experience first-hand (or as near to first-hand as I could) the situation. As well as seeing and appreciating the situation, I wanted to experience the actual boxing. I was too old to enter the amateur and professional setting (as well as too un-coordinated) but I did experience the training – and one of my respondents (Dan) undertook to give me boxing lessons, so I learned something of the skill of boxing.

The major studies in the area (Wacquant and Sugden) were ethnographic in nature and focused on one specific setting. To a large extent I focused on the situation called the Fight Club. In another setting (with Dan) I also worked on individual boxing lessons and participated in some group activities with what male and female white collar boxers. The third setting was in the National Boxing Academy.<sup>1</sup> I spent approximately 1000 hours on observation, 700 at the fight club and 300 in other settings.

The regular site of observation was the fight club, which I attend regularly and got to know many of the boxers. As stated this was not a traditional neighbourhood club, but was based in the city centre and involved members from a wider social situation. This was of interest to me, as the central issue of the study was a concern with the development of capital, and the differences in people with different 'amounts of capital'. The other 2 sites I found useful and tend to use them as 'comparisons', as were the other clubs I visited through my ABA work and to interview. It helped me to focus my observations and make sense of them by seeing something slightly different or seeing the same phenomena in their different settings.

I participated in activities in all of the sites. This I think was helpful in that it enabled me to relax in the setting and to get me accepted as well as giving me a 'feel' for the sport. I could begin to appreciate and understand the vigour of training and real challenges of the sport. In terms of the central focus of the study it allowed me to see the ways in which my 'capital' could be developed (bodily and social) to gain an understanding and feel for the process of the boxers.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Boxing Academy was situated in a local college, it allowed promising boxers intensive training whilst engaging in a (formal) educational study.



## *The Fight Club*

This was a small gym in the city centre, fairly close to the business sector but also to an area which was thriving with bars and night-clubs. It had been started by Charlie, an ex-army fitness instructor who initially rented the premises for himself and his family and friends to train and developed it into a thriving club. The "Fight Club" was highly organised in the form of structured sessions which people joined in with. It was situated in a fairly gloomy building and entry was controlled by an intercom. On arriving one immediately enters a large room with about 20 punch bags all hanging from the ceiling. In the corner was a small boxing ring. Pictures of Muhammad Ali adorned the walls. The clientele was fairly diverse: some business men, some students and "bouncers" from the local clubs and bars. People, generally, mixed well and would chat about the session and the difficulties in working so hard. Some participants were very skilled boxers, others were markedly less skilful and tended to flail at the punch bags. Despite the boxing focus, many had really very little knowledge of boxing both in terms of the art and famous boxers. They participated in these activities as means of keeping fit. The gym was run by Charlie – an ex-army man who had been an amateur boxer – Ken, Mick, and Paul (whom I interviewed) were members who were also useful informants.

Between four and 20 people participated in the sessions. It was at times reminiscent of Wacquant's description more as a factory with people labouring, all the men labouring at the bags, controlled by the instructor who directed all the activities and shouted when they should stop and start. Males and females were strictly segregated and attended at quite different times. Sessions were structured around boxing type activities: participants spent approximately half the session punching bags wearing boxing gloves; the rest of the time was spent in muscular development achieved through sit ups, press ups and other abdominal exercises. The rationale behind this was that boxing training is the best form of exercises and utilises all the muscle groups. In addition to these structured sessions, the Fight Club also facilitated a specific boxing club, similar to the traditional working class clubs. Unlike the situations described by Wacquant and Sugden, the amateur boxers were not fodder for the professional arena and indeed none of the boxers had the slightest interest in becoming professionals. Although a number of professionals did participate in training session, this was as well as their structured training with their *own* trainers.

The basic premise of the club was getting people fit. There were two sections : the gym, where people would come and participate in the unique style of training which consisted of practice at punch bags for about half the session, and floor and upper body work for the remainder; and the boxing section where people, usually young men (there were the occasional token woman), participated in boxing training. Although the club was affiliated to the

Amateur Boxing Association (ABA), it was not a typical boxing club, mainly because the mix of participants was so different from the majority of clubs. The Fight Club had people from a variety of backgrounds and had a fair proportion of university students.

I became a member of this club and, probably to prevent me entering the ring in a serious way, I was sent off to train as an ABA judge. This meant participating in an eight-week course in which I learned the rules and how to apply the rules in a contest. There was one other man and a young woman participating in the course. A senior official, who was an elderly man, taught it. Whilst learning a lot about the art and science of boxing. I also encountered people from a variety of boxing clubs as part of the training and actual judging as I had to attend many bouts with boxers from various clubs competing against each other.

As has been stated, the clubs were generally in working class areas. For example, one which I visited was in a community centre, in a large council estate. It met three times a week and the boys and young men were all from the locality. Although I had no statistical data, and really went by impression, the boxers were not from the lower strata of society but were from working class, skilled tradesmen backgrounds, despite this being an area of fairly high unemployment. In fact the coach, in discussing his club, pointed out that one lad was disorganised – being a teenaged parent, unemployed, and he only turned up occasionally. This seemed worthy of note.

The boxing officials I met tended to be ex army or tradesmen or small business men. Many did not fit into a traditional stereotype. For example the man who ran the judges course was a very cultured man who was as well as a boxing fan was also a devotee of the theatre.

#### *Other observational settings*

Another setting where I carried out my observation was a gym near to a Fight Club, it involved circuit training using boxing, punches and techniques. It is worth highlighting that, whilst not referring to itself as such was explicitly white collar. The sessions were made up of members of both sexes, professionals or semi-professionals, who enjoyed the punching and techniques and who wished to learn more. The young man who ran the class had been involved in amateur boxing (although not at competitive level) and from his experience developed boxing classes. They were structured around the principles of boxing training, similar to many of the clubs. Whilst the classes were organised in a serious manner, there was a distinct feel of playing at it of dabbling at things in a less than serious manner from the participants.



A second site which I used for my observation was in the National Boxing Academy. This was situated in a Further Education College and was part of a number of sports academies, within the college. It was led by two boxing coaches who held national coaching certificates at an advanced level. The idea was to create an environment of excellence, where gifted sports men and women could develop and then compete at a national and international level. At the same time, they were required to participate in an educational programme offered at the college. The college offered programmes which ranged from literary courses to sub-degree level programmes. The gym was extremely well equipped with two large rings and state-of-the-art punch bags and other boxing paraphernalia. There was 16 young boxers, recruited nationally, who were in the programmes.

The trainer and techniques were excellent and focused and the set up certainly gave the boxers a chance of developing their skill. There were occasional drop outs and expulsions. Interestingly, the academy was viewed suspiciously at a local level, as the other the clubs thought it wanted to steal their best boxers, and then the glory would be reflected on the academy and not on them.

**Reliability and validity**

Issues around reliability and validity are important considerations in any research study. Gall et al (1996) and Cohen et al (2000) have documented issues to be considered in quantitative studies. However, Koch (1994)) argues that different considerations should be given to qualitative studies. Guba & Lincoln (1989) stated that when considering qualitative studies, the following should be considered as criteria for assessing validity: *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability*. Koch (1994: 977) provides a table, which links Guba & Lincoln’s criteria to the criteria on which quantitative research is based:

Internal validity	Credibility
Reliability	Dependability
External validity	Transferability

Table 5. Criteria on which to ascertain the reliability and validity of qualitative research

Koch (1994) states that when these criteria have been met the study can be said to be ‘confirmable’.

Based on this method of assessing reliability and validity of the research findings, I devised a series of questions which are considered under each of the headings and will thus demonstrate the ways in which these issues were addressed:

*Credibility:* This means how credible is the study and how believable are the researcher's interpretations of the findings. Guba & Lincoln (1989) and Koch (1994) argue that self-awareness of the researcher is essential. Koch (1994: 977) further states that it is important that the researcher has not imposed his or her views on the study. Koch (1994) states that to present the analyzed data and conclusions to the respondents is an important way of allowing the respondent to verify the findings. Credibility can also be achieved by using multiple sources or triangulation of evidence (Maxwell 1996), ensuring there is an explicit audit trail (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and that the draft report is reviewed by informants (Yin, 1993). These principles were adhered throughout in the study.

*How credible are the findings?*

It is, of course, up to the reader to judge credibility for him or herself, but another check is a consideration of the findings against the available literature and the subsequent discussion will indicate the credibility in some detail.

*Have the findings been verified?*

Verification occurs both by seeing if the findings are developing existing theory and by feeding the findings back to the respondents, which was part of the research strategy

*What part did the researcher play in the development of the findings?*

This is a very important issue, particularly as the methodology of Bourdieu is being followed. Bourdieu emphasises reflexivity as an essential part of the research process, and, because of this, reflexivity is considered later in this Chapter in more detail.

*Is there more than one source of evidence?*

Interviews and observations, as well as drawing from the boxing press (including popular and biographical literature), ensured that there was triangulation of the data.



*What is the interaction with theory?*

As above, the discussion and conclusion will address this particular issue.

*Dependability:* has been likened by Koch (1994) to reliability. Reliability is generally taken to mean would the findings be replicated should another investigator repeat the study. In qualitative studies which depend on the interaction of the researcher with the data and individual, inferences drawn this way may not always be possible. Yin (1993) suggests that the researcher should make his or her steps transparent or in other words ensure that there is an audit trail. Similarly, by reliability Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Koch (1994) do not mean the study is replicable, but rather how consistent were the researchers in their coding and identification of categories. One way of ensuring this is to make an explicit audit trail throughout the study or/and asking other researchers to check the consistency of the coding (that is analysis of the data). This was done throughout the study.

*How transparent is the process of the research?*

The methodology has been outlined and the results are presented in Chapter 4. Issues of reflexivity are addressed in some detail which also should make the process transparent.

*Is there an audit trail?*

I recorded field notes and made transcripts of all the interviews. Examples of the categories and evidence from the data are considered in Chapter 4. Additionally, I used two colleagues to check coding for consistency and reliability, not in the sense that anyone coding the data would establish similar codes, but that there was a reliability and consistency present in the coding of data.

*Confirmability* of the study is achieved when the study has achieved credibility, dependability and transferability. (Koch, 1994: Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

If the above questions were addressed, then the answer should be that the research has conformability. However, it would seem that the question: *is the selected method the most appropriate* is an important one and this will be considered later in this chapter in the section on reflexivity.

Maxwell (1996) argues that there are two main threats to validity: researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias means that the researcher imposes his or

her views on the research, and reactivity is defined as the influence of the researcher on the informants. Triangulation of data, feedback to informants and an implicit audit trail will address these issues. Additionally, I asked colleagues to review the coding to ensure there was logic and consistency.

An additional check to the reliability and validity of the study was the issue of reflexivity as this was central to Bourdieu. It was addressed throughout the study. Later in this chapter is a reflexive account of the research process; it makes transparent the ways in which the ideas and presence of the researcher interacted with the data to establish the concepts and ideas.

### *Transferability:*

Koch (1994) defines this area as the extent to which the findings 'fit' similar areas or issues, in other words does the explanation make sense in another context. This can also be referred to as external validity or generalisability. In this context, generalisability is not sought in a statistical sense, such that is the findings can be applied to the population as a whole but rather in a theoretical sense. The findings can be related to the existing body of knowledge about the issue and may add to the theoretical understanding. This is best explained by Yin (1993) who claims that when considering qualitative case studies, one should consider external validity at a theoretical level, rather than in a statistical sense. That is the particular ways in which the research addressed, coincided or refuted the particular knowledge base which is available on the subject area. Whilst this is useful and indeed essential for any research study, to some extent it is avoiding the issue of generalisability.

The sample in any qualitative study is, by definition, small. The researcher tends to study one or a small number of settings and/or interviews a relatively small sample of people. In statistical terms this has absolutely no power and really cannot be generalised to the population as a whole. Qualitative researchers, e.g. Yin (1993), have argued that generalisability comes a comparison of the findings with the appropriate theory. However, the question or issue of sample is still relevant and to some extent is often avoided or overlooked and it is worth considering when trying to account for the validity or reliability of a research project.

One approach would be to attempt to obtain a representative sample and argue that through its similarities with other settings and other people the results can be generalised. The research can be related to the theoretical issues and the reader can, through the information which is provided on the sample, determine its similarity to his or her own particular setting and thereby determine its usefulness. The problem with this is that the main criteria for obtaining a sample in qualitative research are not based, necessarily, on representativeness.



Patton (1990) has addressed the sampling issue and referred to it as purposeful sampling. By this he means selection of the sample because of particular characteristics which will inform the study. He lists the various approaches which can be taken to sampling in qualitative research; the basis of all the approaches is a particular reasoning for their choice. In other words the researcher should have a pre-determined strategy for his or her choice of settings or respondents. Patton's approaches vary from the selection of a typical case to a convenience sample. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also considered sampling and developed the concept of theoretical sampling, by which they meant choosing a sample and add to it, deviating from it to address particular theoretical issues.

Schofield (1993) takes up the issue of sampling, when considering generalisability and argues that a consideration of the sample/setting is a useful goal against which to consider the generalisability. She determines three areas: *What is? What may be? What could be?*

*What is*, consists of studying a typical, or more specifically, a setting which represents the particular area which is being investigated. She does not advocate a mathematical approach to determine strict representation but rather advocates selecting what is considered to be an average or typical sample. *What may be?* allows a study of change and *what could be*, is an exploration of exemplars or exceptional cases.

In this particular study, the settings chosen were in a particular locality, the North East of England. The main observational setting, the "Fight Club", was in many ways an atypical setting, but it did have a boxing club as part of the facilities. In the course of my field work I came across a number of other clubs and facilities which gave me a measure of typicality and I found them all similar and was confident my setting was representative. Clubs were, of course, not identical and could differ in emphasises and focus; an example of this being the one club which produced highly focused and aggressive boxers.

Schofield (1993) also suggested returning to the theory to consider a synthesis of the findings from other studies. Both Wacquant and Sugden's studies gave me an excellent basis for comparison, and while there was a degree of cultural difference the similarities gave me confidence that the findings have a degree of generalisability.

In my choice of informants I followed the principles of appropriateness and adequacy, (Morse, 1991) and selected people who could actually inform and articulate the issues I wished to explore. In my selection I did not go for typicality, ability to inform being my key selective principle. In the establishment of categories my observations notes however did provide a strong basis comparison and checking out of the emergent issues. In practice this meant that the data was not skewed according to onset of opinions and

all the emergent issues were triangulated. I also ensured there was adequate representation of both middle and working class and amateur and professional boxers.

In retrospect, I could have chosen my sample for interviewees from the observational settings but I think that the categories and emergent issues would not have developed to the extent they did, had the interviewees not been less widely selected. Wacquant (1992) in his study also deviated from his setting and interviewed people from the wider boxing circle in the Chicago area.

## Reflexivity

Wainwright (1997) in his consideration of the issues of qualitative research discussed the importance of linking the finding to a social theory and thereby not just providing a description of the phenomenon, but also of exploring the underlying social relations. To successfully undertake this he advocates the use of reflexivity, which he argues, is not just about:

“demonstrating the validity of the research to an audience, but rather a personal strategy by which the researcher can manage the analytic oscillation between observation and theory in a way which is valid to him or herself” (Wainwright, 1997:7).

This section will consider the issue of reflexivity. As I followed the theory and methodology of Bourdieu, it was clearly important to address the issue of reflexivity, which is an extremely important part of Bourdieu's theorisation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). My understanding of reflexivity was the ways in which the knowledge was constructed by the researcher in light of his or her particular habitus and particular academic interests or more specifically the ways in which the academic position of the researcher has shaped the research. In this section issues of reflexivity will be addressed and this will allow the reader to assess the validity of the particular conclusions.

Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) outlines three particular issues in reflexivity. The researcher should, initially, consider his or her particular social position, gender, ethnicity and look at the ways that this may have influenced the research. The position the researcher holds in the academic microcosm should be considered and finally the particular intellectual biases of the discipline from which the research has been constructed.

Following this approach the first issue which I considered was my particular social origins and how this influenced my interaction with the research. Firstly I am a professional male, an academic working in an academic institution with the job title university lecturer which carries a certain status and social connotations. In the field work I did nothing to



disguise this. Demographically, I am a white male, British and in particular Scottish, from a middle class background all of which of course has indications or connotations of the field. Specifically in the course of the research, I looked at the whole area of amateur and professional boxing which has been explored in the data analysis as predominantly a working class sport. The interaction of my middle class in this particular setting, potentially, raised many issues, although on reflection there were more potential than actual issues. The fact of my gender was an advantage, as boxing is a predominantly masculine sport and the settings I investigated were almost exclusively all-male. My gender did not stand out and my socialisation experience and much of my life experience were not dissimilar to the respondents. I am Caucasian, and although black people are disproportionally represented in boxing, in the North East of England boxing is a predominantly white working class sport. I therefore thought gender and ethnicity were not particularly inhibiting factors in my interactions with the respondents.

However, in the construction of data and conclusions reached it was a slightly different matter. In my analysis I did not really address the issue of masculinity, certainly not in the depth in which I addressed social class. It can be argued that constructs of masculinity, in the context of boxing is a useful and profitable area, but one could argue that social class is equally as important. What is of interest here is my decision to select class as opposed to gender. I think there are a number of reasons for this selection. I am male and was working with other males to explore a construction of the sport of boxing. There were many shared assumptions and areas which both I and my respondents would take for granted and I therefore did not focus on issues around masculinity. My particular background is nursing, a female dominated profession, and on looking back it was (almost) with a sense of relief I entered in the world of boxing and was unlikely to wish to explore gender issues in boxing, if at an unconscious level I was trying to escape gender issues!

Social class was an interesting issue. Academically I am interested in class as a construct, and therefore I am likely to be interested in its effect in the context of boxing. How my class influenced my interactions was interesting. I think the first issue was the people interviewed. Although demographically, many were working class, they were generally, if not exclusively, fairly articulate and used to mixing with a variety of people, and certainly were not put off by my presence. There may have been some reticence initially but as the interview progressed this was quickly overcome and, I think, gender and a common interest in boxing overcame any initial reticence. I will consider this later when I examine the ways in which it may have influenced my interaction in the observational settings.

Bourdieu's second issue, in his consideration of reflectivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is one's position in the particular academic microcosm: I classified my research as educational and within the area of the sociology of education. In terms of the discipline of the sociology of education and its particular view on the world, I would argue that I am relative novice in the area but clearly there are sociological issues in health and the body of knowledge in sociology is constructed in a particular way and my reading and reflections would be focused by this approach. I hope to have made processes transparent which would allow the reader to determine any biases.

Coffey (1997) considers in some deal issues which are pertinent in an ethnographic study and in particular the ways in which the ethnographic self can influence any interactions in the field and the construction of data. Her initial area of consideration was the "interpersonal field", that is how did the researcher interact with his or her respondents. The first issue which arose was the breadth of the study. I examined both traditional working men's club settings as well as the more middle class white collar settings. In the white collar settings the participants were mainly professional men. I was maybe a little bit older, but not really any different from the other respondents. I chatted to people, got friendly with the trainer who took the class and when I told him I was doing this research he was particularly helpful and allowed me to interview him and gave me some other contacts in boxing.

The "Fight Club" which then I found out by chance, I went along and found it ideal. It is organised in two sections: the gym which offers structured sessions round boxing training, and the boxing club, reflective of the ones common in the North-East. I started to attend and became friendly with the trainer, I participated in the sessions, began to prove myself and show an interest in boxing and eventually became involved in the boxing club. As part of the boxing training I thought it was important to participate in some of their activities and wanted to do some light sparring. I think they probably felt sorry for me and suggested that I became a judge i.e. train as an Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) official, which was particularly useful. I attended a boxing theory course and sat and passed the exam, qualified as an ABA judge.

The issue of social class arose in my ABA involvement. I think people were surprised when I told them my occupation and it was commented to me by people I had not informed; it clearly was a talking point. However, I think I was genuinely accepted. Again it is easy to classify this type of activity as working class in a stereotypical manner, in reality there are people from various walks of life. I did not really stand out. I was explicit about doing the research, but I think people did not quite understand what I meant by research and introduced me as someone who was writing a book. Again, a lot of the amateurs / professionals were used to interacting with journalists, so discussion and interviews were not a major issue. I think I fitted quite well



into the background, merged in the boxing scene and was, therefore, able to develop and participate fully in the settings

I made many friends. This is a particular issue for Coffey (1997) which she considers in detail in her work. She argues that while friendship is important it is often not quite true friendship as the researcher has a vested interest in the proceedings. This was not quite the situation with me. I think I became genuinely friendly with some of the respondents in a way comparable with my other friendships. I was reflective about the process and field interactions, but, perhaps this is how I conduct all my relationships. I found myself become quite angry with many situations, but angry on the part of the boxers and not angry with them. An example of this is the difference between white collar and the traditional type of boxing. I found that the traditional boxing was highly structured, highly regimented way with safety paramount. The way the white collar boys (and girls) sometimes rough shod over all these rules made me feel really annoyed. It seemed as if class put them above these rules and regulations.

Coffey also discusses the embodied self, the ways in which the physical self became part of the process. It was very important for me, to experience and understand the boxing situation. I engaged in boxing training 3 or 4 times a week, and became good at it. My reading on physical capital (Schilling, 1992) also led me to reflect on the process. Wacquant's body capital with the emphasis on exploitation was difficult for me to relate to my fitness trajectory.

Although I experienced, and sometimes excelled, in sports as a schoolboy, later on in life I wanted to become fit and felt I needed to do a bit of exercise. I started going to the gym, and found I enjoyed doing different activities particularly structured activities like aerobics and classes etc. I began to drift in to some boxing classes. I felt rather daring about doing it, so therefore in a sense I started to build up physical capital if only for my own self concept. I created some sort of 'street cred' among friends. I could really appreciate the whole notion of body capital

I also made friends in the gym and made quite a lot of contacts that were useful to me in all sorts of ways that one would not have expected. Professionally and in terms of discounts, tradesmen and so on, I also experienced the link with social capital. I could therefore see parallels in the research and my own life.

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered the research methodology and the methods selected upon which the study was structured. It has considered the ways in which the particular approach has focused on the theoretical ideas of Bourdieu. It concluded by a consideration of issues of reliability and validity

in the context of the study and in reflexivity that is the part the researcher played in the development of the study. The following chapter will consider the findings of the study.



# Chapter Four

## Results of the Study

### Introduction

In this section the results are presented in a tidy and seamless manner, the reality was of course quite different. Analysis was undertaken more or less simultaneously with the collection of data, on completion of each interview, as this allowed for focusing and the explicit development of the emergent ideas. The analytical framework of structure, process and outcome was established on completion of the interviews. The subsequent observational period, as well as allowing further development of the categories, also enabled the model to be tested and developed. The presentation of the categories, throughout this chapter uses specific examples from the data to illustrate and provide evidence for them. The majority and from quotations from the interviews, as the respondents were talking in direct and focused way about the issues. It must be emphasised that the period of observation and participation was also important and provided a background and orientation without which the analysis would not have been possible. It also allowed a verification of the analysis through the triangulation of the data.

### Overview of Findings

Before considering each category the story line, or overview of the findings, should initially be established:

The findings revealed that boxing was viewed in a particular way by society. There are a number of myths and stereotypes around boxing. People approached the sport very much from their class position; they had in some way to reconcile exploitation and the clear risks, which are involved in engagement in boxing.

The structure of boxing was concerned with the ways in which the class position of the individual could interact with the sport, middle and working class individuals had a differing approach to boxing. The working class boxers had a particular disposition in which exploitation and the taking of risks was implicitly, and often explicitly, accepted as the norm.



The actual process of skill development was also established, and the sheer difficulty and complexity of these skills was established. Whilst many of these skills were particular to boxing, arguably some of them (e.g. focus, control of emotion) could be translated into other areas of life.

The outcome of all the training was the actual boxing match; but outcomes were considered as to how the (wider) skills, developed through boxing, impacted on the individuals' life. The phenomenon of white-collar boxing was considered with boxing's traditional working-class focus. I found that the data indicated that boxing reinforced class position; it did seem to add to its participant's life. Whilst the skills were not always seen as transferable, it did increase the social capital of the individual. This framework is represented in figure 6.

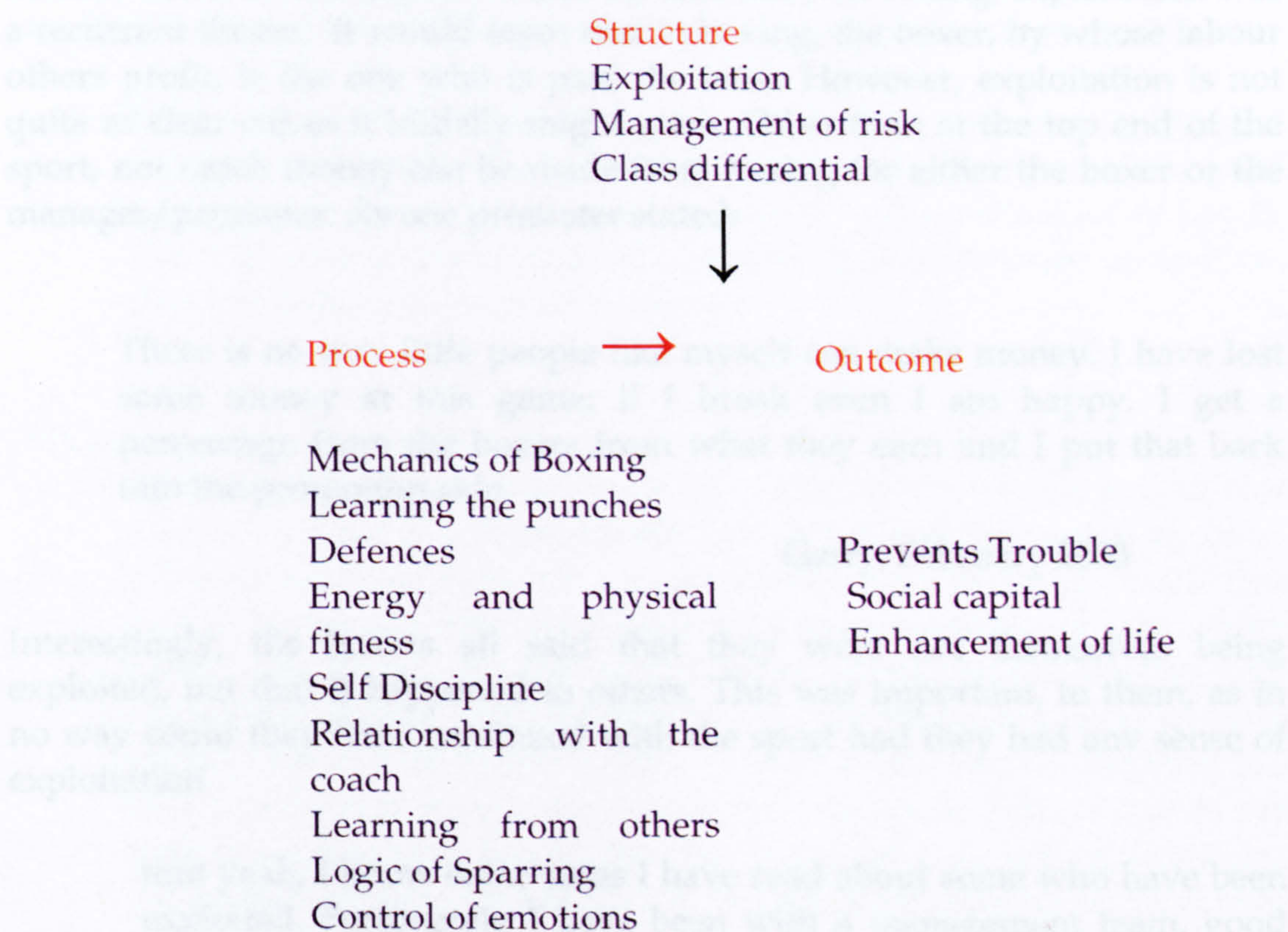


Figure 5 Relationship of the categories to the Donabedian framework of Structure, process and outcome



## Structure

The term structure, in this context, is used to indicate the particular notions and ideas held by society and by the boxers themselves, and how this influenced their interaction with the sport. Three areas emerged: *exploitation*- that is others used the body capital of an individual for *their* own financial gain; *class differential*- this highlights difference in class approaches to the development of body capital; *management of risk*-management in the perceptions of the individual as opposed to practical strategies for risk management.

## Exploitation

Both in terms of the interviews and the literature on boxing, exploitation was a recurrent theme. It would seem that in boxing, the boxer, by whose labour others profit, is the one who is paid the least. However, exploitation is not quite as clear cut as it initially might seem. Other than at the top end of the sport, not much money can be made from boxing for either the boxer or the manager/promoter. As one promoter stated:

There is no way little people like myself can make money. I have lost some money at this game; if I break even I am happy. I get a percentage from the boxers from what they earn and I put that back into the promotion side

Gerry, February 2003

Interestingly, the boxers all said that they were not themselves being exploited, but that it happened to others. This was important, to them, as in no way could they have continued with the sport had they had any sense of exploitation

mm yeah, I know some cases I have read about some who have been exploited. Fortunately I have been with a management team, good trainers and friends. A lot of fighters are exploited in that they don't know the level of the opponent they are going in with, the financial side I can go on and on, because at the end of the day you've got your manager and promoter saying 'this is what you get for this fight', you don't really know if they are telling you the truth, from the first arrangement of the fight, whether they are getting three or four times what they are telling you they are getting. Mm I have not got any solid evidence about that but that could easily go on. Obviously knowing a lot about professional fighters the wool could easily be pulled over their eyes.

Anthony, February 2003

Whilst, people are unlikely to admit to being duped, and whilst they did not sense exploitation on a large scale, there was a sense that regardless of what they did, other people would benefit from their labour. This was obvious from those interviewed. Many thought that their labour would be used by others for their gain no matter what their job was and boxing would be no different. This was fairly typical across interviews as is illustrated:

The government added to the problem by adding VAT. In small hall boxing, now small halls hold about 300, if you look at business, if you take 17% there is not much left to pay the boxers. So the business in small halls has failed.

Gerry, February 2003

There was a sense of exploitation within the arena of boxing, but it was usually done by other people and not by those people who were interviewed:

When I finished fighting I thought I just want to train kids in the gym and give a bit back. You are doing all the work. There's a lot of good managers, there's a lot of good managers, but there's a lot of hoods. The kids were being ripped off. I knew I had to promote as well, do shows and that cost me a lot of money.

Ged, February 2003

And:

What you've got to remember with boxing is the type of people that are not the same type of people that in general that grow up to be solicitors and barristers and you know that kind of thing. People that go into boxing are kids, like meself, off a council estate, not very bright. So it's easy to, not to exploit, you know, when you are dealing with promoters, people who are promoting you managing you, so your average kid is just someone off a council estate, not the brightest kid with figures and things. So it's easy to, you know, I don't like to say exploit, it's typical in boxing that the boxer ends up with nothing and the promoters ends up with a lot. In its history, you know Joe Lewis ended up broke, where does the money go? But that's the reason, most boxers are street kids come off of a council estate and they are not the brightest kids in the world. That's not to say that they are not intelligent, academically intelligent. So when the promoter, manager tells him something regarding his purse, the kid don't know. I can only speak for meself when I turned pro if my manager said to me "you are getting x hundred pounds", I'd have just took it. I am not very good at adding up and reading and writing, and so it would have been easy for someone to have exploited me. And it does happen in boxing that's a fact.

Ged, February 2003



With the managers and promoters, exploitation was acknowledged but (like the boxers) it was always done by someone else. For example the manager promoter Gerry, in discussing Terry (another promoter/manager) said that he thought his boxing matches were exploitative of the boxers.

The potential for exploitation is great, if you want to see exploitation go along to Terry who will pay £300 to the fighter, who has a gentleman's club in the \*\*\*\*\* Hotel. The chaps will go and will drink and gamble. In six three minute, two minute round contests, the lads will....now in my view that's real exploitation.

Gerry, February 2003

Despite this stance a former boxer, whom I encountered during my observations stated, about Gerry:

"Gerry, he's got a Ph. D. in conning, I got a crap deal, but his boxers were really badly treated ..."

Field notes, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2004

Terry organised a series of events (four annually) and as part of these events would stage boxing matches. The events were in the form of a fairly formal dinner, with evening dress obligatory. It consisted of a comedian and an after dinner speaker, usually someone involved in boxing. After this was completed, about 11 p.m., the boxing would begin, usually in the form of 3 contests, each of six rounds. It was no more exploitative than any other type of boxing and was similar to that of white collar boxing rounds. Gerry could have said this to illustrate how altruistic he<sup>7</sup> was or because he had a sense of exploitation of labour in a general sense.

It seemed that many of the respondents and especially those from working class backgrounds, saw their lot in life to work for others and not do terribly well in terms of finances or status. Boxing could represent a way out of this situation. Wacquant (1992, 1998) discussed these ideas in some detail and it is fairly well accepted that many see sport as a way of improving their lot in life. Sugden (1987) entitled his work "the Exploitation of Disadvantage" to capture this idea. The disadvantaged seeking boxing as a way to better themselves in turn became exploited.

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<sup>7</sup> It would seem that boxing in particular is viewed as an exploitative sport, in a way that other sports are not. Football for example is seen as a way in which players can make serious money.

I regard amateur boxing as an apprenticeship for people to box pro. Because if you're going to get punched on t'nose, in these days when people are unemployed you might as well get punched on t'nose for a few quid rather than getting punched on t'nose for a trophy. So what I do I develop my kids in the amateurs but always served an apprenticeship in the amateurs to box pro. The things you can achieve in the pros are far more greater than what you can achieve in the amateurs. You know everybody I don't think anybody aspires to a career amateur. If you say who do you want to be as a boxer they will say: Muhammad Ali or Mike Tyson, no one ever says 'I want to be an amateur boxer until I am 35 years old'. So everybody wants to be a professional boxer. I'd say 90% anyway.

Ged, February 2003

While others were making money from their efforts, the boxers were also benefiting. Wacquant refers to this as body capital that is they (and others) were using their bodies as capital. This idea was central to the study and of particular interest was the ways in which this body capital interacted with other types of capital. It did not seem quite as straight forward as Wacquant and Sugden suggested. Most of those interviewed were fairly small time players and certainly did not feel exploited. They also perceived the risks involved but they put them into the context of other areas of risk in other areas of their life. There was no reason to suppose any exploitation, nor would it have it have arisen, but for the strong emphasis in the literature. The important issue from this area is the way individual's view boxing, that is they view within the context of other areas.

Ged, for example, saw boxing as giving him an alternative and enhancing way of life:

I have nothing bad to say about boxing. I were born and bred on a council estate and I am a typical kind of boxer, if I hadn't gone into boxing I would be in the same place as a lot of me friends: prison, dead a lot of dead end jobs.

Ged, February 2003

The most famous (and most successful) boxing promoter is Don King, who is quite notorious in the ways in which he exploits and makes money from boxers. McRae (1996) outlines this in some detail. He outlines the ways in which millions of dollars were removed from Mike Tyson's bank account when he was in prison by King, and other ways in which boxers were exploited and manipulated by Don King.

I think that whole issues of exploitation are reflective of the class position of those involved in boxing. These were working class and it seemed that to them exploitation was almost inevitable, that is someone would benefit from



their labour. The relationships in boxing were reflective of their position in society, this leads onto the next category class differential.

### **Class differential**

In the white collar setting there was a very clear difference in my observational settings between the white collar and more traditional boxing settings. The atmosphere in the former was much lighter and the participants were generally older. They did not take it as seriously nor did they follow the rules with the same degree of intensity. I participated in both traditional and white collar settings and I found the traditional a more focused and a more intense learning situation. There was a disregard of particular rules and regulations. For instance, in the light sparring, the boxers did not wear head guards, whereas this was *de rigeur* in the amateur clubs. As will be discussed later, this could be because there is more at stake in the traditional boxing setting as white collar boxing primary function was a means of keeping fit.

It was also interesting that without out exception I was treated with professionalism and helpfulness by all of the "traditional" boxing settings and representatives, whilst the "white collar" setting were considerably less helpful.

Working class engagement in boxing as means of advancement is fairly well documented. It is a theme particularly evident in studies by Wacquant, Weiner and Around, and Hare whose respondents saw boxing as a means of self-advancement. In terms of class this is particularly applicable to those from working class backgrounds. Boxing is seen as one way of improving the socio-economic lot and advance in a positive and constructive manner. This was particularly noticeable in the 1920s and 1930s. Weiner and Arnold illustrated the representation of the various groups involved in boxing at different stages in its history. In 20<sup>th</sup> century America Jewish boxers were replaced by Italians and then by black boxers and so on. It would seem that, in to-day's United Kingdom asylum seekers could see boxing as a means of self-advancement. As one respondent said:

In the last three or four years you have seen a lot of foreign kids come over, refugees earn their living through professional boxing, obviously they had a bit of amateur experience in these third world countries, less fortunate places. There's a few places down in London where they accommodate them, allow them to stay in the gymnasium as long as they do a few duties. Its bringing more foreign kids over professional boxing, its bring a few over London is absolutely swarmed with them, Kosovos, kids from other places. There are a few good kids so it would be interesting, obviously they haven't had the financial backing in the past so they have seen a way through here. The last promotion I was on-- they have a room half the size of this they have a bed a locker,

they train all day apart from that they have a little bit of duties to do, that's how they live. The last fighter, I fought, which I got beat on points, from Trinidad he was doing the same, he was living in the gym and after the fight he could afford a flight to go over and see his parents. You know and that's the way a lot of people live down there.

Anthony, February 2003

With the growth in the past few years of the so-called white collar boxing, it could be argued that boxing is becoming much less class dominated, as one of my respondents stated:

Even today you've still got your white collar workers in London and in New York earning millions, they're millionaires, earning thousands a day to participate in the sport of boxing. No it's a mistake to say that boxing is a working class sport.

Fred, July 2002

However despite this the meaning of boxing has for the individual does vary according to the social class of that individual. This is illustrated by an examination of two boxers:

Marty was a young man who came from a very deprived area in the North East of England, his father had a criminal record and had spent some time in prison. He was not academically bright and when asked what his highest academic achieved was he said that he once got a "d" grade. He is good with his hands and his trade is that of a bricklayer. He drifted into boxing:

I lived on a rough council estate and went there once and kept going and going. Me mates packed in and I stayed there...Boy's Welfare Boxing Club.

Marty, March, 2003

He found he was good at boxing and stuck at it and developed himself:

I think it depends on how dedicated you are and how you want to do it. When I started to box, all the kids my age were much better than me but I just stuck at it and stuck at it and got better. I wasn't even a very fast runner but now no one can beat me. It's just over the years just building up and building up

Marty, March, 2003

He became a professional boxer and was very successful winning a (minor) world championship. I interviewed him in his home and whilst was in a "rough" area, was considerably better and better furnished than his neighbours. Whilst he did not articulate it clearly, boxing for him represented a way of improving his lot. Another of the respondents, Al, who had a very



successful career as an amateur, stated that, for him, boxing did indeed improve his lot:

JF Do you think that this can be translated into other parts of your life?

Al I'd say I can only go off on my life and I would say yes, I'd say obviously the boxing dictated my life, without a doubt. If I hadn't boxed I know I'd be in a different situation to what I am in now, definitely.

JF In what ways has it changed your life?

Al It changed my life in the fact that you know if I hadn't have been to the Commonwealth Games and that and I hadn't have been so successful I don't think I would have lived over Newcastle way I would have stayed over Durham way. Now I am living over Newcastle way, I am living with a girl and I have a little baby son, I moved over here because I got well known through here through the boxing. If I hadn't have been boxing I would probably never even come over this area, I might of, who knows. Other areas in the fact of my physical training even if I didn't box I would still carry on training. Loads of things which would be hard to explain to you just thinking about them off the top of my head, if I went away and thought about it I would probably think of the ways in which it has changed my life.

April, 2003

Wacqaunt (1992 and 2004) maintained that the boxers in his study, whilst from the ghetto, were more socially skilled than their neighbours and had more indicators of purposefully engaging with society, such as bank accounts and academic qualifications. This finding was in keeping with my respondents, those classified as working class were tradesmen or the sons of tradesmen

Anassi (2003) stated that the working class young men engaging in boxing could take on the middle class values of organisation and commitment and hard work. In the context of the men I interviewed, this assumption of Anassi was a somewhat patronising over-generalisation. Rather, for the working class young man boxing and physical development through boxing could do much to enhance their life, not least through the money which could be made from boxing.

This point is illustrated by the middle class respondent Paul, aged 22, a medical student, who had taken up boxing as a hobby:

JF What brought you in to boxing?

Paul I don't know really....I was never particularly sporty at school, I used to do a lot of running but that was it and then through the Duke of Edinburgh Award I got into karate, I did that for a while, I came to Newcastle and kind of experimented with other like martial arts but I didn't feel that any of them were actually that realistic so I just wanted to try something with a bit more realism, like to see if I could be able to actually get in there and do it! With my background I have never had any like physical confrontation or anything like that, it's not something I got involved

JF In learning to box, what do you think has been helpful?

Paul I think, when I put my mind to something I am quite committed, like fly boxers in the gym five days a week are prepared to do that. I don't know I'm prepared to look at it from the technical point of view, you know what I mean. I appreciate it's not just two guys beating the hell out of each other, there is actually a lot of finesse and skill to it, I am keen to see that, I am keen to learn about that.

May 2003

The meaning of boxing was quite different for him. Boxing was a means of keeping fit, in perhaps a more enjoyable way than gym work or an individual activity and developing a particular skill. This was fairly typical of the boxers who were interviewed from middle class backgrounds.

I also participated in white collar boxing situations, specifically the boxing classes which were ran by Dan. He taught some technique and allowed participation in some very light sparring. The classes were at quite the other end of the spectrum from Charlie's at the Fight Club and certainly from the (traditional) amateur clubs I visited. I found that few of the participants were boxing fans, and in fact most of them knew very little about the sport. For them it was away of keeping fit, of developing their bodies, a bit of fun and perhaps a means of demonstrating their masculinity.

However, to leave it at this would not do justice to what many of the respondent said nor the contradictions within boxing. For the men of both social classes, there was something around proving themselves as a man, whilst boxing could be and was divorced from destructive aggression:

I think the challenge with boxing is to turn it into purely a skill, to turn it into purely something you can learn rather than something that gets attached to all the stigma of having to fight or being in an aggressive situation.

Dan, July, 2002

The competitive element was acknowledged:



The reason for the skill is not just so much it's not just about hitting but about not getting hit due to your self preservation, so, you can watch a lot of boxing fights and after maybe twelve rounds neither of the fighters are particularly hurt. Especially at amateur contests because you have the head guards and the shorter rounds and you have the judges. It is a counter-productive sport in that it's detrimental to your physical condition in its extremes; but in a controlled environment the skill is not so much about hurting people but it's about how you protect yourself, how you anticipate someone else's reaction, how you deal with their actions, how you react to being put in an unpleasant situation, how you handle pressure.

Dan, July, 2002

aam ...I think its like as I said everyone's watched the Rocky movies, it's a legal fight at the tend of the day and you are not going to get to hard and its not a team event with other players. It's down to yourself if you win

Al, April 2003

It was interesting that three of the writers on boxing, Wacqaunt, Agusssi and Mathews, all thirty something men, whilst able to write well and objectively about boxing all were compelled to take part in at least one fight activity. They seemed to feel compelled to prove themselves as men.

To return to Bourdieu's terminology the *habitus* of the groups are quite different and one's position in society, which is reflected in the habitus, can make boxing quite a different experience. "Ged", when discussing Mathew's book "Looking for a Fight" made this point very well:

Oh David Mathews yeah. It were a good book it were quite entertaining you probably would have enjoyed it but me being in the game and seeing it were a complete load of rubbish. For a non-boxing person to read it were good, it was interesting. I am not slagging the guy, but he got into the part of being a boxer, he trained, he got his weight down. So he did know how it felt, you can't have one fight and know what it was like and he lost the fight. I actually had a kid on the same bill.

I can't put my finger it were a long time since I read it and I just skimmed the book, he only had one fight trained in the gym. But to try and form an impression of what it's like to be a boxer and having one fight and losing the fight it's not a true picture. Not when its like people like Sugar Ray Robinson had 200 fights, there is no way you can put yourself in the position of a professional boxer, he did a good job to a certain extent because he trained but the book were entertaining to a non boxing person. But to a boxing person it is so different. We had a

guy hanging around here for two years doing a fly on the wall documentary. But even in the 2 years he's not even captured the full picture; maybe 5 years. I am doing it 7 days a week, 365 days a year. I were in this gym on Christmas day. Like I say this guy were following us for 2 years and some of the things he's got, when I have actually sat and watched it....there has got to be a cut off point, a start, a middle and an end but because there is always something good going on and what would be good if someone could come in and do a film now and come back in 5 years time and see where the kids have progressed to.

Ged, February 2003

It would seem that looking at the development of this particular category that, as suggested by the literature, the ways in which individuals interact with the sport very much depends on their class position in society. Boxing has a very different meaning for the middle class professional and the working class youth. The quotation above illustrates this very clearly and while the term *habitus* was not used, he means that despite a similar (if superficial) level of engagement, if the *habitus* is different than the experience will also be different. Boxing does not make the *habitus* but it certainly seems to reinforce it.

### **Management of Risk**

All physical activities carry a degree of risk and clearly boxing is no exception. It must be emphasised that, despite the seeming potential for injury and many well publicised cases, serious injury in the ring is comparatively rare, and is lower than many other sports (British Board of Control of Boxing, 2003). What is less clear cut is the long-term squalae of boxing. While brain damage and Parkinson's Syndrome and the so-called punch-drunk former boxer are certainly not inevitable nevertheless there is incidence of brain damage which can be associated with boxing (this is detailed in Figure 8, page 134).

Risk was dealt with by contextualisation, i.e. the viewing of boxing as being equally as risky as other areas of life. Also, many boxers thought that the risk was worth it and the benefits of engaging in boxing were such that any price to be paid was well worth. While many cited Muhammad Ali as an example, and said that, whilst he did have Parkinson's Disease (or syndrome), had he known this outcome he would still have continued with boxing.

Can we just say I picked up the paper yesterday and there is a footballer died and that's with heading the ball. You see some of them balls coming across it must be 40 miles an hour and that, he goes up and hits it with his head, fully with his head, a boxer doesn't go in and do that. A boxer tries to dodge that ball and dodge that punch, he goes for it and willingly puts his head to it, so there are loads of sports, your



motor racing, everything but it has always been ban boxing, ban boxing! At one time I would say boxing was the poor man's sport where a poor man could come through to be somebody.

George, December 2002

All the respondents skated over the potential risks involved in boxing, they contextualised the risk and usually stated that things happened anyway, so boxing was no more risky than other areas of life or even life in general.

JF Do you think it's a risky business boxing?

Ged Oh God, yeah, without a doubt. It's one of the riskiest sports if not the highest risk, I have been involved in a tragedy myself mm I trained a kid called Billy for a title fight, he boxed a kid called Jamie, from London. York Hall -British title fight, cracking fight, not a brutal fight at all, it were a hard fight, after the fight, Billy won, we all went home only to find out that Jamie had collapsed and ended up in a coma, he ended up dying. Like I say the fight weren't brutal but without a doubt it's one of the most I wouldn't say dangerous but you know... I say this to a lot of people I have had 65 pro fights and two years ago was run over at the zebra crossing at the top of the road here so its just as dangerous crossing the road here. So it's just as dangerous professional boxing as crossing the road. But you can't take away the fact that professional boxing or any boxing is dangerous you are in there getting hit but that's not going to stop people doing it. Climbing mountains and hand gliding is dangerous but it doesn't stop people doing it you know. You've got a freedom of choice in this country and that's why a lot of people won't be able to stop professional boxing.

February 2003

And:

Yeah, definitely. For me there's allot outside the ring that gives boxers brain damage than there is inside the ring. For me there a lot of issues.

Jack, September 2002

Perhaps, more typically they thought it would not happen to them or they just did not want to think about the risks.

We all know the risks. I don't think there is anybody who goes in that ring and doesn't know the risks mm obviously the medical side of it certainly has improved with CT mm and there has been financial backing from major promoters to help towards the cost as well. And you know anything like minor eye problems they are

really strict with those things. At the end of day if you are going to get in the ring there will always be a risk. As long as the fighter knows it.

Anthony, February 2003

And:

There is always a risk, there is a risk at doing everything, football you can break your leg. If it happens it happens you just hope that it doesn't.

Marty, March, 2003

Young males' attitude to risk is well documented, both in terms of behaviours and risk taking in sports. In almost all behaviours men are likely to take more risks than women are (Waldrum, 1995). Whether it is due to nature (testosterone) or nurture is debatable, nevertheless the precocity to take risks seems to be strongly associated with being male. It is not surprising that risks are skated over within the context of boxing. It is also acknowledged that manual occupations carry a degree of physical risk and perhaps it is part of the habitus of the working class male that risks are inevitable and one should not spend too long in thinking about them.

This section considered in some detail the aspect of the results which considered structure that is the societal ideas which were around boxing. Particularly influential seemed to be the particular class of the individual and the ways in which the class position could influence the interaction with boxing. It would seem that learning does not take place in vacuum and that people bring perceptions and views which are based on their relative class positions. The next section will focus of the particular skills and actual learning which takes place when the boxer embarks on his career.

Based on this analysis the following is proposed:

- Boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas, it is thought to provide a framework and structure for the boys and young men participating and can prevent trouble.
- There is an increasing number of middle class people becoming involved in boxing, the so-called "white collar" boxers, this is quite a different experience from the working class involvement.
- Exploitation and risk taking intrinsic aspects of professional and amateur boxing (certainly at the competition level).



## Process

This section will consider, the actual mechanics of boxing. The issue of the development of capital is central to the study and the categories, in this section are concerned with body capital. They will be considered in some detail. It also represents the process of the development of body capital and how through understanding the process one can gain a sense its components. The skills of boxing and its components are well documented. Wacquant, for example considers them in some detail and in many of the biographies and autobiographies they are also cited. The important issue is that they emerged as categorised from the interview and the period of observation are in keeping with the acknowledged skills of boxing.

### The Mechanics of Boxing

When watching a boxing match, either amateur or professional, the first thing which strikes the viewer is the speed and the seemingly effortless performance of the skilled boxer. Reactions are incredible speedy and the boxer has to simultaneously attack and defend. The other issue which cannot be underestimated is the sheer amount of energy which goes into a performance. Having participated and watched boxing matches at close proximity, this never fails to impress me. The unprepared boxer is immediately apparent. One can conclude that boxing is an activity that is geared towards competition and the boxing match is the outcome of months, if not years of training. It is a highly skilled activity and it demands practice for extremely fast moving response.

Boxing as an activity exists on many levels. At one end is the World Championships events and in particular, the Heavy Weight Championships which seems to capture the public imagination. At the other end of the spectrum is the middle aged businessman or bank manager who is using some of the techniques as a means of keeping fit. Whatever the level of involvement, it would seem that boxing is a very skilled activity and, as such, is something which must be learned and cannot be immediately entered into and practiced.

Clearly, the degree of commitment to the sport reflects the extent of the training that takes place. At one end of the continuum is the professional boxer, who is utterly committed to his sport. An example of this is the professional boxer, Scott Harrison, the present featherweight champion (whom I observed training). He is focused and dedicated to a very high degree. This was a recurrent theme in Wacquant, who further elaborated on this and in his description of the preparation of a boxer likened it to a 'monastic' existence, and emphasizes the celibacy involved. The celibacy comes from the phenomenon that prior to the boxing match boxers are required to abstain from sexual activity. There was no foundation, in any

research, for this myth that disengagement in sexual activity can lead to heightened prowess in the boxing match.

When asked to summarise what boxing meant, one of my respondents, Terry stated, "ability, bottle and character, or the ABC of boxing"; he had this in huge letters in his gym. This proved a useful framework and was something I could experience in my observations, interviews and in my participant observation. Ability was essential in boxing; "bottle" was required- to go into the ring was frightening experience and character was also required as there was much boredom in the training and a high degree of self discipline was required.

Professional boxing is as simple as ABC Ability, obviously you've got to have ability to be a professional boxer. You've got to have a lot of bottle and you've got to have character, it's all about that person and you'll find what its about. Then, it's like anybody's job, your job you'll find out what kind of person you are and that makes a boxer. You have to have ability to get to a certain level, its all about levels this game

Terry, July 2002

There are physical skills in boxing that can be learned and put into practice. On one level these skills are very simple. There are really only six types of punches: jab, straight punch, rights and left upper cut and right and left hook. These punches do require a degree of skill and co-ordination and technique to be effective. Coupled with the opponent trying to hit at the same time as well as defending oneself, it quickly becomes obvious that all is not straightforward.

The particular skills of boxing will be considered in this chapter and a focus will be on the actual mechanics of the skill of learning boxing. The core elements are the boxing stance, the punches (straight punches: jab and right across, right and left hook, and right and left upper cut) and footwork. The boxer will, of course, lead with his non-dominant hand.

In the traditional boxing stance the boxer stands at a 45 degree angle, back heel lifted his knees slightly bent, fists resting just below the cheek bones and shoulders turned to the same angle. This stance allows him to move freely and enables him to attack and defend simultaneously.

The English Amateur Boxing Association describes a scoring blow as a punch, delivered with force to the scoring part of the body, and with the knuckle part of the closed gloved with either hand, delivered with force and without infringement of the rules. This definition also broadly holds for professional boxing. It also provides a useful background against which one can consider the actual mechanics of boxing.



Depending on whether the boxer is right or left handed, the less dominant hand is the one with which he leads. The boxer who is right handed will lead with his left and reserves his right hand for the stronger punch; this stance is termed orthodox boxing. The boxer who is left-handed will lead with his right hand and is termed a "southpaw".

There are a variety of punches and combinations of punches but basically there are three types of punches utilised by the boxer (straight, hooks and upper cuts). The jab is a sharp and crisp movement, has little power and generally aims to encourage the opponent to open his posture and allow for a stronger attack. In other words it tends to be a precursor for another punch. The right across of the straight punch, involves pivoting through the back foot, twisting the hips and shoulders and then hitting with the weight of the body, there is a great deal of power in this punch. Hooks are punches where the arm is "hooked" and upper cuts are delivered in an upwards direction, usually to the chin or ribs.

The best shot in the book is the straight jab, for me everything comes from the straight jab. All the hook and everything they are all the bonuses, that's my opinion. I was a southpaw, which means I lead with my right hand, if you lead with your right you've nae space all the time and I've a pretty long arm so he couldn't get at me. If you've got a good jab it's important and obviously you've got to work on your combination punches. But a jab's a big, big help and I mean then you see what power the lad's got and the different aspects but you see the power. You get rid of the weaknesses from the amateur to the pro game. If they got a good hook you'll work on that or body shots or whatever. I am strong believer that everything comes from the jab. Obviously your feet work's important, it's all about balance and co-ordination.

Terry, July 2002

Hooks also tend to be very powerful punches and utilise the full body weight when punching. Hooking the arms and elbows and delivering a blow with the force of the shoulders as suggested makes them extremely powerful punches. Turning the shoulder of the opposite side, lifting the arm, carrying the punch through with a shift in the body, ensures the body weight is behind the punch.

Uppercuts are short range quick explosive punches are made with a dip of the shoulder and by pushing up through the legs. The palm of the glove facing the face and the fist moving up wards. It is designed to punch the chin or the rib cage.

Footwork is very important and is designed to ensure maximum speed and reaction to the stimuli. The boxer must be in the correct stance and move in

the correct direction at all times, the lead leg should have its toes pointed forwards, there should be a gap between the legs which is always in place and the feet should be light and “bouncy”. This stance is very important as it allows maximum movement and defence, for instance if the feet were to be crossed it would be extremely easy to push the boxer over.

All of the skills are deceptively simple and require a great deal of practice. They are, as I found out to my cost, very difficult to learn and execute correctly, and that is practising them one by one and alone. Trying to put them together, let alone when trying to defend oneself, is considerably more complex. The notion of a schema or mental pattern is very useful in considering this phenomenon.

### Learning the Punches

Like any activity, the effortless performance of the boxer comes from years of training, which can be extremely focused and demanding of a high degree of commitment. It requires both skill and the physical and mental requirements to support this skill. Physical fitness comes from rigorous training in the gym. In the past ten years or so boxing training has been taken up by many gyms and is seen as an excellent way of developing and maintaining fitness. Several of the boxing training techniques are taken up by the fitness industry and boxing circuits are common place. An example of this is Dan, one of my respondents, who was employed to teach physiotherapy students to skip.

The dedication of a boxer cannot be over emphasised. It requires a long term commitment, day in day out, of sometimes tedious activity. It takes years of such activity for the boxer to become at all successful. For example, shadow boxing was the most boring activity, yet was essential to develop the skill

“It is important to get patterns of movement embedded in one’s brain and for this reason I am practicing and practicing” (Field notes, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2003).

The first thing about boxing is that it involves punching. The aim is to punch; obviously the boxer wishes to punch his opponent, and to defend himself against being punched or injured. Even at the lowest level the person hitting a punch bag must do so effectively to gain the maximum benefit from the activity.

The actual learning of the punches, how to deliver and execute them is extremely skilled and difficult. It is not usually something which can be done automatically. The boxing stance is actually very difficult: the boxer is required to put his hands near his face – to guard – and then to face the opponent in a certain way. This maximises both the position of attack and



also of defence, but it is almost impossible for a person to get into and maintain that particular position in an instinctive way. "Still battling with technique" is a constant theme in my field notes. (10<sup>th</sup> October 2003).

The punches are learned by initially being taught and then practiced either on punch bags or focus pad; that is the trainer would hold up the flat pads positioned on each hand and the boxer would deliver punches at the instruction of the trainer. These can be used for a variety of reasons: to develop a particular skill, either strength or power punches or/and a variety of combinations of punches. It also tests the boxing stamina. Punches can be practiced on punch bags of which there is a variety of types and also through the activity of shadow boxing. This involves the boxer quite literally boxing against his own shadow and practicing developing the moves.

In my observations I saw and participated in all of these activities which ranged from boxers being prepared for professional bouts to individuals engaged in a purely fun activity as a means of keeping fit and with no real interest in skill and development at any particular level. I think the common factor is that it is very hard physically, which means that the individual very quickly becomes tired, and so, a high degree of physical fitness is really necessary. Usually, the development of this level of fitness demands a high degree of training and can often involve circuit training in which pads which are hit for around one minute are incorporated with other fitness activities. However, when preparing for a particular boxing match, the professional or amateur is expected to carry it out for longer than two minutes in amateur and three minutes in professional boxing. This may not seem lengthy but can seem like an eternity when one is in the boxing ring. One of my respondents told me of the time when a football coach at a local football club asked him to take two apprentice footballers and get them to fight each other to settle a dispute. He related that after two bouts of three minutes they were both totally exhausted and had had more than enough. In my observations when I was at ringside it struck me of just how tired and out of breath the boxers were at the end of each round.

The punches also are not easy to execute correctly. Many may get them first time but may need to be practiced and developed. The world champion boxer Chris Eubank describes how difficult it can be to learn the correct technique of particular punches.

"People sometimes say to me why do you have to repeat one punch so many times to perfect it? Well, these are not simple skills. It took me years to learn how to throw the right hand. Then there's the left hook, the right hand to the body, the left upper cut to the body, the right hook to the body - these punches take years and years to learn. You climb through the ropes and just do it. (Eubank. 2003:39).

As Eubank indicates, these punches took hours and hours of practice to perfect and develop.

“Over and over, thousands of times in the corner, every day obsessively for weeks”. (Eubank. 2003:39)

As Waquant (1992) and Oates (1987) maintain, boxing is not something which is natural or spontaneous. It is a skill which is learned and which is against nature<sup>8</sup> or counter-intuitive. People, or at least most people, do not want to hit back when attacked; an alternative is to run away.

## Defences

The next aspect of skill lies in the ability of the boxer to defend himself against attack. Defences can be defined as, slipping away from the opponent, ducking, weaving and bobbing around the opponent, guarding, blocking, parrying and covering, getting away, sidestepping, circling retreating and swaying out of distance.

Nowadays, when boxercise, and boxing circuits form part of many peoples' regular exercise, it is often forgotten that the purpose of boxing is to fight against an opponent. The boxer must learn to prevent his opponent punching him. The actual stance of the boxer, not quite face on; the balls of his feet not on the ground and his hands guarding his face, allows him to “duck and weave” around his opponent. It is important that he maintains his position or leave himself open to attack.

Additionally, there are certain moves, which the boxer can take to deflect punches. He can raise his hand to block punches; step back, move to the side or duck. In learning to box these moves are all practised and rehearsed. However, the boxer then goes on to focus on defences but in the context of someone trying to hit and attack; the boxer is simultaneously trying to attack, and look for opportunities to hit his opponent.

It requires a high degree of co-ordination and ability to function under pressure. Being punched is quite a shock: in my participation the most difficult part was the shock of someone punching me in the face. I only engaged in light sparring and the intent was not to hurt, but in a more realistic boxing match it must come as quite a shock to experience a punch.

Anthony      Basically, if you've never been hit on the chin for six months..

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<sup>8</sup> In the “Nun's Story” by Kathryn Hume the heroine a novice nun reflects on the difficulties of life as a nun and, in particular, finds the life of a nun against nature. She can only think of the training to be a ballet dancer as a similarly unnatural experience. She also could have added boxing. Interestingly Wacquant emphasises the almost religious devotion and dedication involved in successful boxing and draws religious imagery.



JF                It's a shock

Anthony        It's a shock all right. I have seen it happen before and I have experienced it on smaller levels myself..... where you have been maybes 2 or 3 months and you take a contest and its really hard to get used to them. You never get used to them, at the end of the day if you get hit in the right place you go down and that's it.

February 2003

Oates (1997) in her consideration of boxing argues that the natural thing to do when being hit is to turn away. The boxer cannot do this and he has to continue to fight. This brings us to another skill, the ability to take punches. The boxer must be able to tolerate punches, some of which are stronger than others, to take continual jabs which at best are irritating, so he must be able to function under pressure.

Oates (19987 and 1998) maintains that one of the hardest aspects of boxing is the ability to get up when knocked down or seemingly overcome by one's opponent not to lie there on the canvas (as many of us would) but to get up and attack with renewed vigour. All of these are skills which are not easily learned:

The hardest thing was, initially my initial reaction when someone was throwing punches was initially to go back, was to like move. Obviously you can't do that, so the hardest thing to get to grips with was to tuck up and move forward when some body's punching. Like the exact opposite of what you should be doing is to move forward when someone is throwing punches at you. That took us a while to get to grips with that.

Jack, September 2002

This can be mapped onto "bottle", that is the sheer tenacity which enables the individual to go into a situation that may bring about a degree of physical pain. The boxer also puts himself on the line, in that he is very much on his own and in the ring is totally dependant on himself:

Al                Well yes, you get your individuality and you also getting... like in boxing, like it's the fact that it's the closest you are gong to get to one on one combat. It takes somebody else's pride away from them. If you beat someone at tennis or football or whatsoever it's just game but with boxers it is very much hurt their pride. It is not violence but it is the closest you are going to get to taking what someone has got away from them.

JF How do you think the loser feels?

Al Again it depends on the character. I don't believe someone can be the best until they have been beaten. I know that you learn more from the defeats, if you are a good boxer, than you do from your wins, that's what builds character. If you can take a mark and come back from it, and learn from it and so there's probably another thing in boxing you are going to learn from it .....it's character building. It is taking it on the chin that someone is better than you, but it is just at that particular moment, at that particular time.....

April 2003

### Energy and physical fitness

As a sport boxing takes up a high degree of physical energy to say the boxer has to engage in two or three minute rounds. This does not sound as if it is much but in reality it is enormously exhausting; professional boxers in championship fights have to go for 12-15 round matches.

A very high degree of physical fitness was a prerequisite and much of the training was involved in developing this:

I am a boxfighter. I box but then I can fight, a pressure fighter as well in the late rounds I will just out work them, the pace...no-one can stick to me pace. I just get stronger and stronger as the rounds go on...five, six, seven. After four rounds I am tired but I go back to the corner and I come out as fresh as a daisy and I just keep going and going and get stronger and stronger. I have loads of stamina really, me heart...

Marty, March, 2003

Clearly this is an aspect which requires attention and focus in preparation for the professional or amateur boxing match and much time is spent in building stamina. Traditionally techniques such as skipping and running are part of professional boxing training, the aim being to build stamina in the boxer. In preparation for a fight these requirements are very much part of the preparation. Mailer (1978) describes this in some detail in his account of the so-called "Rumble in the Jungle" - Ali against George Forman in 1974. In the film "When They Were Kings", which was made about this particular fight, this "hard training" was also very apparent. There is a particular scene which brings this across, in which George Foreman, a big man, is skipping in the background, very ably and very determinedly.

There is some controversy around this area, that is training regimes, which I identified in my data collection. Many of the "old time trainers" followed a particular regime that, to a large extent, has been tried and tested. In the past



20 to 30 years advances have been made in this area, with research-evidenced based approaches such as building up aerobic capacity through specific techniques. This can, also, lead to tension between the trainer and boxer who often is well versed in such training activities and techniques.

A lot what was taught was important to the success of the individual, it was more akin to witchcraft than it was to science, and because of that I actually became involved. In the first instance in providing facilities mm for boxers that were much better and much cleaner and I started to take an interest in the medical side and the relationship between work, sleep and food. I want to try and examine that more closely and bring on board more educated and better opinions.

Gerry, February 2002

## Self discipline

Dedication and commitment were essential prerequisites and without these nothing could take place at all. Many talented boxers failed to make the grade due to a lack of this commitment. Wacquant likens the commitment of boxing as on a par with someone entering religious life or being totally committed to religion:

It's got to be dedication. He's got to be able to stop in on a Saturday night or do the same as the likes of myself and them, take the dogs out for a run on a Saturday and Sunday night, Friday night, when the lads are down the town, smelling the old women and drinking the beer and all that and then come back in the gym on Sunday morning and think that they can wash all that out; they can't, they can't. You've got to have that dedication, training. The main thing is training. If you are dedicated to your training, you keep off the smoking, you keep off the drink and, myself, I was twenty eight years old before I had my first pint of beer. I could go to weddings, I could go to parties, I could go anywhere but, I would never touch alcohol. Now when you get a lad like that in your gymnasium, that is eighty per cent, he is dedicated to his training and the other twenty per cent is family. You look at the family side and that is where you worry about on the family side

George, December 2002

Whilst the training was focused on fitness and on the development of the skill, development of self discipline and standards of behaviour were instilled in the participants. An example of this was one young man who turned up to training wearing a tee-shirt with a crude logo, he was scathingly told that he was not a man and he was just a boy (Field notes, April, 2003)

To successfully undertake these activities a high degree of self discipline is required. This was a consistent theme throughout the interviews, and many boxers did not make the grade through their inability to stick to vigorous and consistent training schedule. Many of the respondents referred to this as “character”, the ability to stick to a consistent and vigorous approach. It also required a high degree of nutritional support and preparation – the boxer has to watch what he eats, there is no room for unhealthy eating and drinking.

It is for me, I eat crap food sometimes lots of times. I just cut daft food out eat good food, take vitamins me energy foods Lots of running, lots of sweat running with sweat gear on

Marty, March, 2003

Many could not maintain this level of commitment and fell by the wayside:

I have had many a good young lad here, he’s been really great, his parents haven’t backed him and he has just called it a day. His girlfriend doesn’t like boxing, so he has called it a day, many a time, women, sometimes are the worst. We have one young lad here, he looks to me like he could really go to the top, he could win a British Title if he turns professional but he is now going round with the young girl from xxxx area and he is not doing his training now, he is out with her rather than be in the gym. So there you are the rot sets in.

We run here like today as it is Monday, Wednesday and Friday and Saturday morning any one can come in here and use the equipment, any one can come and use the equipment and they can go through, you can see them they look world beaters; hitting punch bags and all sorts, but you see the dedication is not there to keep doing that five and six days a week, two days a week, two mornings. I look at some of them there now they are in their thirties, their forties and you say to yourself, by God if he’d stuck it in when he was about eighteen years old he could have been really good. But it’s their dedication. That’s what takes a fella to the top, dedication

George, December 2002

### **Relationship with the coach**

Central to this category was the relationship with the coach, and really, without this, learning would not take place. It was considerably more intense than the usual teacher pupil relationship, and often resembled a father-son relationship:



After two month I walked in here one Sunday morning and here he is standing at the office door there and he said " Aw George, can I come back boxing I don't want football?"

I said "You can come back provided do you as your told, if I tell you leave your corner and go out there and start with your jab and a right cross and that, you do it. You don't go ripping out there trying to rip the fella to bits". He did. Now I like young Davie for doing that, he was just at my house yesterday, he calls me Dad. He is thirty six years old and he calls me his Dad and he came from a family of losers, he came from a family of fourteen, that didn't include the mother and father, there was sixteen with the mother and father, a family of fourteen, big families in those days.

Anyhow same lad never looked back after that, he went on and I started taking him on the pads a lot, and I took a special interest in him.

George, December 2002

This was predominant through all of the interviews and observations. It was also something which I experienced myself. One has to, as a pre-requisite, like and respect the trainer. It seemed to have something to do with the frustrating nature of learning to box. If this relationship was not present it would, I certainly found, be difficult to maintain any sense of motivation. Both Dan and Charlie (the Fight Club) were a source of much encouragement.

### Learning from other people

Although learning to box involved much solitary practice, such as shadow boxing (which is incredibly boring and does test ones commitment, this was a continual complaint as reflected in my field notes), generally it is an activity which one does and learns with others. The relationship with one's peers and the trainer are very important. Al discusses the importance to him of role modelling:

Al            I was quite decent for me younger age, I was mixing with blokes, men, I used to go to the pro gyms when I was amateur and to spar with the pros, the blokes, other boxers and also me coaches. I would probably learn more from other boxers than I would from the coaches. That's the type of person I am because I look at other people rather than, when someone tells us to do something I find that harder to do than watch meself and adapt that.

JF            Copy other people?

Al            Copy certain traits of other people.

April 2002

And Rick mentioned the particular role models who influenced his development:

JF                      Who would your role models be?

Rick                    My big brother, when he won a European, in the 90's, silver medal, it would have to be like Muhammad Ali and his views on life and things like that, I suppose that has affected us. A boy called Jamie Coil who is at the club, he was Scottish Champion at four different weights and I liked the lifestyle he lived, like the way every body should live really. He was just dedicated to his boxing and his fitness everything, he would na drink, he would keep perfect fit you know what I mean.

July 2002

Many of the boxers would take some high profile boxers as their particular role model:

Some boxers role model themselves on one particular boxer, Nazeem Hamed role modelled himself on Herrol Graham.

Al April, 2002

### **The Logic of Sparring (Wacquant, 1992)**

In addition, to the building up of a high degree of physical fitness the boxer is also required to develop and learn skills of boxing and he has, to be competent in the boxing match to put them together. This can be done with focus pads and punch bags, but, more importantly by sparring with others. Sparring ranged from what is termed "light sparring", that is, where the opponent is not trying to hurt the boxer badly and is, therefore, lightly punching; to sparring which paralleled the boxing match. Wacquant (1992) considered this in some detail in what he termed the logic of sparring. By this he meant the using the rationale and focus of sparring is a means of building up the skills and expertise of the boxer. As Al sated:

I think the actual skill of it people can learn anyone can learn but the actual going in the ring and taking punches and giving it back that's the difference. It's not so much learning because anyone can learn anything I can learn to play tennis if I do it every day for 10 years. I could go and play football, but actually going in there and doing it is a different skill. A lot more comes into it, there's timing, co-ordination, power, strength and things like that.

Al, April 2003



It is yeah! You learn a lot from punching the bags and working on the pads. But the only feeling that would prepare you for the competition of an actual fight is actually getting in the ring and sparring. That's where you sharpen your skills in the sparring in the ring.

John, July 2002

In the highly focused professional fights, sparring was a large part of the preparation and partners were chosen with the actual opponent in the match in focus and also to develop specific skills in the boxers. In the more general learning situation partners were chosen in a much less scientific basis and often it was someone who was around the gym, or roughly someone with the same degree of skill as the boxer.

Sparring is a real test of the boxer, as knowing punches practising defences is only of use in an actual boxing match, and it really is the only way to develop skills is through actual fighting. Wacquant emphasized the choice of a partner and the "logic" of that choice. In my observation and interviews choice ranged from highly focused to an ad hoc arrangement. What was of note - sparring became a 'rite de passage' one had achieved a certain status when sparring became an activity in which the boxer (usually young or 'white collar') engaged. There were also certain rules and it was frowned upon if boxers tried too hard or became too aggressive in the context of sparring.

Also, sparring could be used as a means of control. Mathews (2001) describes a situation in which a boxer taught a "cocky" colleague a lesson in sparring. He outclassed the boxer and give him what amounted to a "hiding" (as opposed to competition between roughly equals); thus the boxer was shown his place in the gym.

The schema of boxing is developed really through interaction with another person. Depending on the level of expertise, sparring partners are, also chosen to develop a specific skill or sub-set of the skill and sometimes with the acknowledgement of the individualism of the other person. It is really only the way to learn the skills of boxing. Sparring is sometimes "light" that is the blows are not delivered with force nor can be serious mirroring an actual boxing match. Through defence and attack one can build up a clear boxing schema.

It is a must sparring you have got to spar mm there's some spar very little, believe in very little sparring, especially the people on the top end of the money bracket, they think 'why should I risk that injury and lose many thousands of pounds'. I think if you are on a lower level the lads are trying to get experience you'll do more and more sparring and try and get more and more experience with different styles of

opponents, to get as much as you can and that's where the benefit is to get as much as you can.

Anthony, February 2002

## Control of emotions

Another important skill lies in the control of emotions, the boxer is lost if he could not control his emotions:

Certainly not, once you lose your temper that's the time to call it a day. As soon as you get angry, you're beaten. It's all about composure like mental toughness if you get angry and just start burning your easier to pick off, once you have done that you're beat you know...

Anthony, February 2002

If he is to be successful, the boxer cannot allow his feelings to get in the way. If he becomes angry then he will behave in an unfocused manner and retaliate inappropriately. He therefore needs to "keep his cool". Wacqaunt (1992) uses Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour to describe this phenomenon. This is clearly something which is developed through sparring. There are of course clearly recognised exceptions. Anthony, when asked if he ever become angry, went on to describe how one of his opponents broke the social rules:

I would have to say no, have to say no. On the odd occasion frustration for reason or another. There was an incident where I was sparring with a less experienced kid, he was a typical roughhouse really getting stuck in and he was fouling with his elbows, like I said earlier, when you are sparring there's no need for that really. But in competitions certainly not, once you lose your temper that's the time to call it a day.

Anthony, February 2002

Boxing is a contest, a fight or combative situation, but it is interesting that there is (or usually) not any real antagonism between the two boxers yet they have to behave as if there were. Strategies had to be devised, by the boxer, to deal with this type of phenomenon. Marty, describes his particular technique:

Marty      Nothing I am a blank I don't think I turn me back on them I don't think I talk to the trainer I go when the referee says touch gloves, I don't even look at them cause when you look at them. If you look at them you might get second thoughts you think "how big your muscles are"? When you turn around you are fired up anyway.

JF            How do you get a sense of control in the ring?



Marty        I didn't at first I used to lose me rag I used to get tied up and now anyone punches hard I would lose me rag but... now... its experience really

March, 2003

He also told me of his experience when sparring with a world champion boxer, how he tried to intimidate him (and did):

I didn't get on with him. I went up there to do him a favour and didn't like him. He just expected to knock me out for some reason. He wouldn't touch me gloves, just stared at us, tried to intimidate us. He was awesome when fighting, world class. He wasn't like that in the gym, like.

Marty, March, 2003

I think some people can, some trained from a young age, there are trained to be a boxer. Tyson is an example of that he was trained to be boxer from young age, boxing is half mind half physical you can train the body but you can't train the mind. The mental aspects is a massive difference if people concentrated more on the mental side they'd have more successful boxers.

Al April 2003

Psychological one-up-manship is an important skill. Muhammad Ali developed this to an art form and more recently it was seen in the boxing of Naseem Hamed.

George      Big! Yeah! There's a lot of young fellas in the amateur world using it as well now. In all styles they are using it. This carry on of where at one time the referee used to call you together and you would go across and shake hands and 'Best of luck mate' and away back to your corner and you'd come out fighting. But not now, they come out across the ring and they're staring at each other, it's only the copies from the big men, you know what I mean the likes of Muhammad Ali, stand staring at him whereas it was never done before, never done before. You always take you own fights, right away back and you would see it, even if they did not like each other, whenever they came together they would shake hands with each other, go back to their corner, may the best man win! Not now, they come across and they stand staring...

JF            It's like a mind game they are playing as well isn't it?

George      Yes, that's it. There's a lot of copy goes on, you see they have

seen... there's a thing that's just stopped now where Sugar Ray Leonard did. He started to get into the ring and Sugar Ray Leonard and was leading his left hand out and keeping it out like that, keeping it in front of his opponent's face like that all the time, now that's been banned, that's banned. I would never have it when I refereed and I refereed for twenty years.

December 2003

JF Muhammad Ali and Nazeem had a psychological effect on their opponent, which could put them off. Is that the kind of thing you meant?

Al Not so much putting them off but if you are mentally strong, mentally confident of your ability mm if you can overcome your fear then you are half way there, well you are there because its just a question of homing in your physical abilities. Obviously you've only so much power and strength but you can improve that especially now-a-days with sports science the way that's going, improve your physical ability but I don't know of anyone who can improve their mind ability unless you can do that yourself.

April 2002

The following is proposed based on the analysis of data:

- A schema is essential an aspect of boxing, even in an activity as physically focused and specific as boxing, societal views and issues can still influence this activity.

## Outcome

The next area of concern is the actual outcome of boxing. For amateur and professional boxers the outcome is the actual boxing match or fight. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the effect participation in the sport of boxing can have on the lives of the young men who engage in it. Or, to put it another way, the development of body capital and the ways in which it interacts with other types of capital. The analysis revealed that there were strong links to the development of social capital and these links were stronger than the other types of capital. It was clear from the analysis that links with formal education were tenuous. This section will consider these particular themes which emerged from the outcomes of boxing.



## Boxing as a means of preventing trouble

The former Home Secretary, David Blunkett stated in November 2002, in a speech to criminal justice professionals, that boxing was an excellent way of preventing trouble. He stated:

"I don't give a damn what it is as long as it works. If there is an innovative programme like young men being taught to box and those young men would otherwise be on the street not learning about self restraint, self esteem, control and ability to use aggression in a different way. Do we say it's not a good idea because boxing the hell out of each other is not a good idea? Or do we say that there is a positive avenue to get these youngsters to believe in themselves, re-engage with school, family and the wider community"<sup>9</sup>

It was a view shared by many of the respondents that the establishment of a boxing club is a positive social force. A particularly pertinent example of this is the outline on a programme for a local boxing tournament:

We try to keep the kids off the streets and instil in them self-discipline and character building. Boxing is a combative sport and as such requires a high degree of courage, self-dedication, physical fitness etc. It also provides an excellent outlet for their natural aggressive instincts, this is excellent training for "the Battle of Life" which the boys will soon be facing, modern life is very hard and the ability of a boy to accept good and averse conditions and decisions in a sporting manner is excellent preparation.

Programme for Tournament, Sunderland, October 2004

The assumption is that the club would take boys off the street and help them have a positive focus in life. Many applied this particular idea to themselves:

Hung around on street corners and just drifted, into.... a gang of street kids hanging around. I drifted into the local boxing club and ...looking back it's the best thing I ever did, there's no history in me family of boxing. Until at 17 drifting into boxing there's no one in me family or no one I actually knew.

Ged, February 2003

JF Do you think if there is a boxing club, does it add anything to the area?

Al I'd say that these days it takes kids, off the street and it gives them something to train for...You know, its not as easy to go to a football

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<sup>9</sup> [www.amenova.com/news/study/sum.709762.shtml](http://www.amenova.com/news/study/sum.709762.shtml)

club because you've got to be half way decent to get in the team. It's a bit confident blowing not to get in the team. Whereas boxing you go there whether you are good or not good. You can go there and do the training you don't have to compete...

JF Do you think it prevents crime?

Al I would say yes because if there is a boxing club in an area it keeps kids off the street. If my coach said to me as a kid, there is a chance of going to America to box if you can keep yourself right for 6 months. Then I know for fact I would keep me self right for six months. If there is not that option there for us then what else have I got to do? It depends where you come from.

Boxing is a sport you can do where you don't have to have much money you only have to pay £1.30 as a sub, and some places if you can't afford that they will let you in. You don't need to buy football boots or a strip you just need to go there and train...

April 2003

And

Fred No. Not necessarily. Put it this way, aggression that is not tapped or directed will be at the expense of somebody else. But if it is directed in the format of amateur boxing it's not at the expense of other people. The aggression on the streets is a real problem and boxing does help to direct that aggression, channel that aggression.

JF In what ways can boxing help people in other aspects of their lives?

Fred That's a good question. I just look at myself, and many of the youngsters I've worked with. Even John, the chap you've just interviewed, he's benefited immensely. Had it not been for boxing John would have been in a real case, I trained John when he was a youngster.

July 2003

However, the notion that participation in boxing could prevent trouble was a particularly strong idea. Interestingly, in amateur boxing the term "fighting" is not considered an appropriate term, as I was informed when I inadvertently used the term.

"fighting is something people do in the streets and is illegal, what we do here is boxing and it is a sport"

Field notes September 2002



JF Do you think boxing prevents crime

Anthony oh yes certainly, mm that's without a doubt. Because boxing is generally brought up in a pretty rough area, it's a rough..but generally, I am generalising here because it isn't in all cases, but generally it is from a working class background where kids haven't a great deal to do .. and are less fortunate in other ways, but it certainly gives them a path in life if they haven't already got one.

February 2003

I have nothing bad to say about boxing. I were born and bred on a council estate and I am a typical kind of boxer, if I hadn't gone into boxing I would be in the same place as a lot of me friends: prison, dead a lot of dead end jobs. So, boxing has been good to me I have nothing bad to say about boxing at all. I then retired 1993 and started training fighters- amateurs- after about a year or so I were asked to train a couple of pros which I did. I thought I might as well get a trainers license and a manager's license, since then I have been promoting and have never looked back since. I have nothing bad to say about boxing it's been the best thing that has ever happened to me

Ged, February 2003

Despite these claims, the reality of whether boxing prevented trouble or not was difficult to establish and was not a central feature of the study. It is arguable that the young men and boys interviewed and who were participants in the observation would have found an alternative and equally purposeful means of developing themselves or if boxing was the turning point. Boxing could represent a purposeful activity, rather than an intrinsic way of preventing trouble.

However, it is the perception of society that boxing can prevent trouble. Bourdieu (1978) sees modern sport as originating in the public school system and it has a strong emphasis in the character building properties of sport. One can conclude that boxing is perceived as building character, through the channelling of aggression into a purposeful and meaningful activity. Additionally the discipline provides this focus: boxing can provide a sharp lesson for the bully which vicariously teaches others to behave and reinforces the purposeful nature of boxing:

You know yourself what it is like in schools, some times the most knowledgeable person is not the best fighter but they can actually verbally bully people, sometimes a verbal bully sometimes people cannot see what they actually do see what people can actually do. They shouldn't be able to bully anybody and the rest of the boys know

that. My first week at the school in ..... all the quiet boys were training, boxing training, we were training in the school gymnasium and I thought there were these two guys watching, so I let them watch they were sitting on the wall bars. Then all of a sudden they started shouting their orders to the other boys and that telling them what are they looking at..... and that, so I persuaded them to put on the gloves with me just to let them see, and I just embarrassed them in front of everybody. Let everybody see ..... the word I used on the radio this morning they were just a couple of 'nulties' that's what they were just a couple of 'nulties' and everybody realized that and they lost their stature. The quietest boy in the whole school or in the whole club can be the best fighter, the best boxer.

Phil, June 2003

This view of boxing is almost exclusively focused on amateur clubs in working class areas. Whilst the professional boxers comes through this route, middle class participants do not nor do they see boxing as way of keeping themselves out of trouble but they do see boxing as building character:

But also, obviously you can be part of a team but certainly as an individual it gives you great strength and character. It develops courage, it does develops courage because courage is like a tap - you can turn it on and turn it off. Some people have more courage than others, everybody has courage but boxing enables you to build on that courage to have greater courage, to have courage for a longer time.

Fred July 2003

And:

Yeah I think the mental attitude that you need for boxing, show in other areas of you life. But I think that is true of all sports to an extent, you philosophically, mentally, show of determination, the reflexes, the other things that you do. Just like little things like having got in the ring and having boxed someone which is just about the scariest thing you have ever done then everything else you do seems a little less scary. You know like standing up and giving a talk in front of a lot of people it's not that big a deal anymore because you have done something ..... so yeah...

Paul, May 2003

However it is difficult to demonstrate any causal link. Did the young men take up the sport because of a positive attitude? Or did the positive attitude arise from participation in boxing? Not everyone from a rough or deprived area, necessarily, is destined to a life of drug abuse or crime, nor do people involved in boxing end up necessarily as pillars of the community. As Ged pointed out:



Yeah there's loads kids who have had talent, ability, there is loads. There was one kid, called... I won't tell you his name, he was so brilliant but he started to believe in himself too much, he thought he were something, he went somewhere else he went blab blab blab and he went to South Africa. He had one fight which he drew and then the bubble burst, he wasn't what he thought he was and he wasn't what everyone else thought he was. He ended up selling drugs and he was shot and is in prison. What a terrible waste because the kid did have talent but instead of moving slow to where he would get one day he didn't want to put the work in.

Ged, February, 2003

### Social capital

A positive aspect, which was continually referred to, was the ways in which the boxers built up a network of friends and contacts through participation in boxing or, specifically, participation in boxing built up social capital in a positive and powerful way. This was a particularly strong category as without exception the boxers indicated the ways in which contacts were built up. An example of this is Dan. In return for giving boxing lesson to his friend, he was given driving lessons. Al and Anthony, as a result of participation in boxing were given career opportunities:

You meet a lot of good people and being in a teaching capacity you have a lot of people come to you and ask you for help in that they want to learn to box. They want to learn something or other you know and you do get a lot of pay backs from that, because the people you help because it's such an awkward area to get someone to school you on one on one people are more than happy to help you when you need it. For example I have been getting driving lessons, I've getting just all different kinds of things from the boxing training, people are willing to give you a bit of a deal back.

Dan, July 2002

The promoter, Gerry, described the ways in which he helped his boxers and he described at length the ways in which he supported a boxer who had employment problems:

Gerry With the academy I have absolutely proved beyond doubt that that is happening. Take my pro here, Anthony, a top class amateur, won 2 ABA titles, competed at the highest level of professional boxing and at the age of 30 is now just accepting the information which I had been giving him for the last 10 years. And is now putting more effort in, a bit late but is now... through boxing he got a job here, do you know the

first training he done here? I sent him to learn about computers and he has a very good job with the company, after his boxing career he will retain that job which he would not have had he not been able to box.

Like take to-day I'm going to-day, I am going to defend a lad against a local authority, sadly, I have to be careful when I say local authority because it is likely to be individuals acting within a local authority. But here you have a lad who has boxed since he was 10 years old, who has boxed at every level other than Olympic and he has had the opportunity to do that. He is an absolutely top flight professional who appears on television, who has appeared on TV in every contest he has had, has the potential to raise the morale of the whole of the area and promote the area. He was injured in his last contest, a genuine injury, a broken hand and after two weeks of sickness they stopped his pay.

JF      Because it was self inflicted?

Gerry Well let's just see why when I get there. Its certainly not allowed for in his contract of employment he's entitled to 6 months on full pay and he's not a shirker. And the sad thing is they cannot see the potential. We completely understand, as an employer, I completely understand you can't be a man down.

February, 2003

There are numerous examples, and this category is one in which the period of observation did much to enhance and develop the idea on social capital. It is difficult to encapsulate in words the degree of camaraderie that permeated the whole of boxing. Through my involvement I built up a great deal of social capital in that I developed a network of people whom I could rely on. I obtained a free gym membership, met people whose skills I could employ and use to good effect. Conversely people could also employ and utilise my skills and expertise. For example, I was asked to design a course on fitness. I was also asked if I could invest in a business opportunity. The premise behind the tournaments is, as well as a night out, to allow the spectators to network, or build a degree of social capital. This social capital, in turn, lead to economic capital and enhanced the career opportunities of many of my respondents.

This is not social capital in the sense of a network and construct of a society which enables people to act collectively. It is, rather, a situation, which allows a set of relations through which a bank of capital can be developed and built up. This can be used for the benefit of the participant. Participation in boxing could lead to advancement in life, not through formal education, but through a network of relations. Interestingly, this applied to all social classes who participated in the sport.



## Enhancement of their life

Boxing, as was argued earlier, is a highly skilled activity both in terms of manual dexterity and in terms of the discipline employed in controlling emotions and in committing oneself to the sport. There was not much conscious acknowledgement of these skills being transferred to other areas of the boxers' lives. However, many, while not involved in professional or amateur boxing, used their skills to make a living:

Dan and Al were, for example, fitness instructors who use their skill to good effect in boxing circuit training and also gave private (one to one) boxing lessons; Fred and John were professional boxing coaches (employed in Further Education); Phil and Terry were trainer managers of professional boxers. All demonstrate that there is a life after boxing.

While the sample was by no means representative many did use their skills in a positive and constructive manner but, it must be emphasised in the boxing or quasi-boxing context. This contrasts with the findings of Weinberg and Arond (1952) who found many of the former boxers they interviewed a sorry lot, who on retiring from boxing they were at a loose end and often were not at work.

Clearly, there are many specific skills which could not be transfer out of the boxing ring but there are, also, particular skills which could be transferred. The central issue is, how can this learning and skills be transferred to other situations? The stereotype of the boxer is the "punchy" nightclub bouncer. This may be the case in some people but not for all the boxers.

Through boxing, many boxers develop networks, which give rise to opportunities in business and employment, often at a level which exceeds their expectations. One former professional boxer (Al) told me that he was destined to work as a joiner in a County Durham village and he now is a fitness instructor, a role that, for him, was a step up in the world. Another professional boxer (Anthony) was employed in his manager's business. All the respondents said that, compared to their peers and contemporaries, engagement in boxing gave their lives a purpose and direction:

I wouldn't mm have gone into crime because I wasn't from that sort of environment but you are so easily lead into crime if, you know, if you are just a working class kid from a working class family. There's a lot of temptation around and one thing and another. A lot of my friends, from me past school, I look back and they've went the wrong way.

Anthony, February 2002

The skills which were clearly and explicitly identified were communication at all levels and engagement in boxing that gave people an increased confidence not only in the sense they could handle themselves physically, but also that they could talk to people and engage in interactions with individuals and groups.

Less clear were ways in which boxing led to engagement in formal life long learning and specifically, to academic work. One respondent did indicate that an interest in boxing led to interests in other areas:

I hadn't have been into boxing I wouldn't have read as much, because I am not a very good reader. But because of the way I think about boxing I read a lot about Ali, a lot of biographies of other boxers and books related to the Ali subject like different books he's written about moral values, things like that as well. Its broadened my scope as well

Jack, September 2002

However, this, was the exception rather than the rule. Most respondents, while acknowledging their learning within boxing, did not acknowledge ways in which it lead to further formal study<sup>10</sup>.

One exception was the comment that individual communication and communication skills were enhanced. George, for example, said that participation in the sport gave him the confidence to mix with other people and to hold his own with them.

I want to walk tall, I can get out there and start to rub shoulders with anybody, that's what it does. To me, in all the time that I have boxed I was never afraid to say to anyone what I thought, I sit on seven committees now : Bishop of Durham and all of them is on them and yet I speak my mind to them, I don't speak Oxford English, which you'll have found out, I don't speak Oxford English or anything like that. I can put myself across and tell them and handle saying yes if it's no and I'm well known in committees for doing that and I say boxing did that to me. Give me that gauntlet and it is still the same, it still says I am going to get up and if you don't do what I want I'm going to punch your bloody nose. No! but it gives you that feeling that you know I'm a man and I am brave enough to step up in that ring, I am brave enough to tell you what I think of you and that is what it does to a lot of young fellas.

George, December 2002

This was also reinforced by Ged who stated:

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<sup>10</sup> Jack commented that boxing and an interest in Ali lead him to read about American history and race relations and this is another clear exception



Again speaking for meself personally, communication skills that's one. It develops your confidence, without a doubt it develops your confidence. I've done talks to people on boxing, like I said before I were anti everything, I were, you know anti police, anti everything. Last May I gave a talk to 300 police officers. I went to talk about boxing. You don't have to be a world champion to talk about boxing I mean look at me, a rough council estate, the roughest in England, I've gone from a rough council estate the roughest in England, actually. So I've gone from a rough council estate to I've got me own gym, I've got other businesses, I'm a success story, I won nothing as a boxer...

The only title I ever won was central area title, then there's other people in Sheffield who won far more than I have ever won and you look at them now they not got a pot to piss in, basically. So you don't have to become world champion to be successful in boxing.

Ged, February 2003

Overall, however, there was a general lack of awareness of any transferability of skills. For instance, it was demonstrated in the consideration of body capital that social class dictated the ways in which the particular schema was formed. That is, whilst the actual schema of boxing is determined by the physical activity, the factors which lead to its development depend on the individual's social circumstances.

Central to the theories of Bourdieu (1994) is the concept that even in the most individual acts there is, at their heart, social factors. Boxing, it would seem from this research study, strongly reinforces the social class of the individual. Therefore, an acknowledgement and a transfer of many of the wider issues are unlikely. White collar or middle class boxers already have skills from their education and professional training and, indeed, have developed the interest in boxing from a need to keep fit. They see it as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

Whilst engaging in boxing did not seem to bring about engagement in formal education, it did increase economic capital. Key examples of this are:

**Dan:** is a fitness instructor whose skills in boxing led him to organise boxing circuit training and then more formal boxing classes. This made him a popular employee and it also led to extra curricular work which could be financially lucrative.

**Gary:** through his interest in boxing he participated as a volunteer with a group of boys and youths who had been involved in petty criminal offences, and this in turn lead to a career in the probation service.

**John and Fred:** both had jobs as professional coaches in a National Boxing Academy

**Terry:** was a professional/trainer and promoter and although he is a small time businessman, boxing was major source of his income. Although he claimed that it was not particularly lucrative it did represent a source of income.

**Rick:** had commenced his career as a professional boxer

**George:** ran an amateur club, but had also set up a neighbourhood gymnasium which was the source of some income.

**Gerry:** ran a successful business and was also a professional boxing promoter

**Anthony:** although his boxing career was finished, it had led to a fairly well paid job with his previous manager (Gerry).

**Ged:** ran quite a substantial gym and had several professional boxers on his books; it also lead him to other business opportunities.

**Mark:** ran an amateur club but also organised dinners where a boxing celebrity would come to talk, again a source of further income.

**Al:** a former professional boxer was now following a career in the fitness industry.

**Phil:** ran a gym with several professional boxers.

**Charlie:** the basis of his gym was boxing, and the use of its skills as a keep fit technique.

It would seem that in addition to actual money gained from boxing , the skills could be used in an entrepreneurial way or could lead to business networking. This allows the following proposition:

- Boxing, therefore, requires a particular habitus, in which risk and exploitation are seen as inevitable. Whilst engagement in boxing does enhance the individual's life it does not lead to engagement in formal learning.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The National Boxing Academy (see page 64) did require the young men to attend a formal educational programme, but this was a deliberately manufactured situation rather than a direct link.



## Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected in the course of the study allowed an investigation in the phenomenon of boxing in the Northeast of England. A structure, process and outcome framework allowed an organisation of emergent categories. The analysis and collection of data was concurrent which allowed a testing and a focus of the categories. The main sources of data were interviews in a fairly formal sense, although the interviews were open and unstructured, and observation. Journalistic accounts and biographies were useful secondary data. To summarise the findings the “story line” on which this chapter commenced will be repeated.

The findings revealed that boxing was viewed in a particular way by society. There are a number of myths and stereotypes around boxing. People approached the sport very much from their class position; they had in some way to reconcile exploitation and the clear risks which are involved in engagement in boxing.

The structure of boxing was concerned with the ways in which the class position of the individual could interact with the sport, middle and working class individuals had a differing approach to boxing. The working class boxers had a particular disposition in which exploitation and the taking of risks was implicitly accepted as the norm.

The actual process of skill development was also established, and the sheer difficulty and complexity of these skills was established. Whilst many of these skills were particular to boxing, arguably some of them (e.g. focus, control of emotion) could be translated into other areas of life.

The outcome of all the training was the actual boxing match; but outcomes were considered as to how the (wider) skills, developed through boxing, impacted on the individuals’ life. The phenomenon of white-collar boxing was contrasted with boxing’s traditional working-class focus. I found that the data indicated that boxing reinforced class position; it did seem to add to its participant’s life. Whilst the skills were not always seen as transferable, it did increase the social capital of the individual.

The next chapter will consider these findings against the relevant literature and specifically within the context of the theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

# Chapter Five

## Conclusion and Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter will consider the implications of the findings and it will attempt to contextualise them against the relevant literature. The genesis of the study was the question: do people engaging in sport, and in particular boxing, relate skills they developed to other areas of their lives? In other words did they engage in life long learning? Tight (1996:36) defined life long learning as:

First, lifelong learning is seen as building upon and effecting all existing providers, including both schools and institutes of higher education. Second it extends, beyond all formal education providers to encompass all agencies, groups and individuals involved in any kind of learning activity. Third it rests on the belief that individuals are, or can become, self-directing, and that they will see the value of engaging in life long learning.

This definition would indicate that lifelong learning is more than engagement in formal education but is an activity which encompasses the life activities of the individual. Implicit within this definition is the interface of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Whilst, engagement in boxing did seem to enhance the lives of the participants, it did not lead to engagement in the process of formal study nor allow the transfer of the skills gained, in boxing, into the formal educational setting. On reflection, implicit in my (personal) definition of life long learning is the notion of accredited learning or the obtaining of formal qualifications. Clearly, one is learning all of the time and formal learning is one approach. Yet, my expectation was that the development of skills and the knowledge gained would enhance and develop the lives of the individuals or more succinctly it would raise their expectations.

The particular challenge of this study lay in linking the findings to the conceptual framework as outlined by Bourdieu (habitus, capital and field), and the Donabedian framework of structure, process and outcome. *Habitus* can be equated with the conceptual categories of risk and exploitation. In the context of the study risk and exploitations are seen as mental attributes or dispositions. *Field* can be considered as both the field of society as a whole and the ways in which individuals can interact with these classes and the particular field of the sport of boxing and its infrastructure. *Capital* can be equated directly to the particular outcomes. Figure 6 represents the



relationship of the categories identified with Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and field.

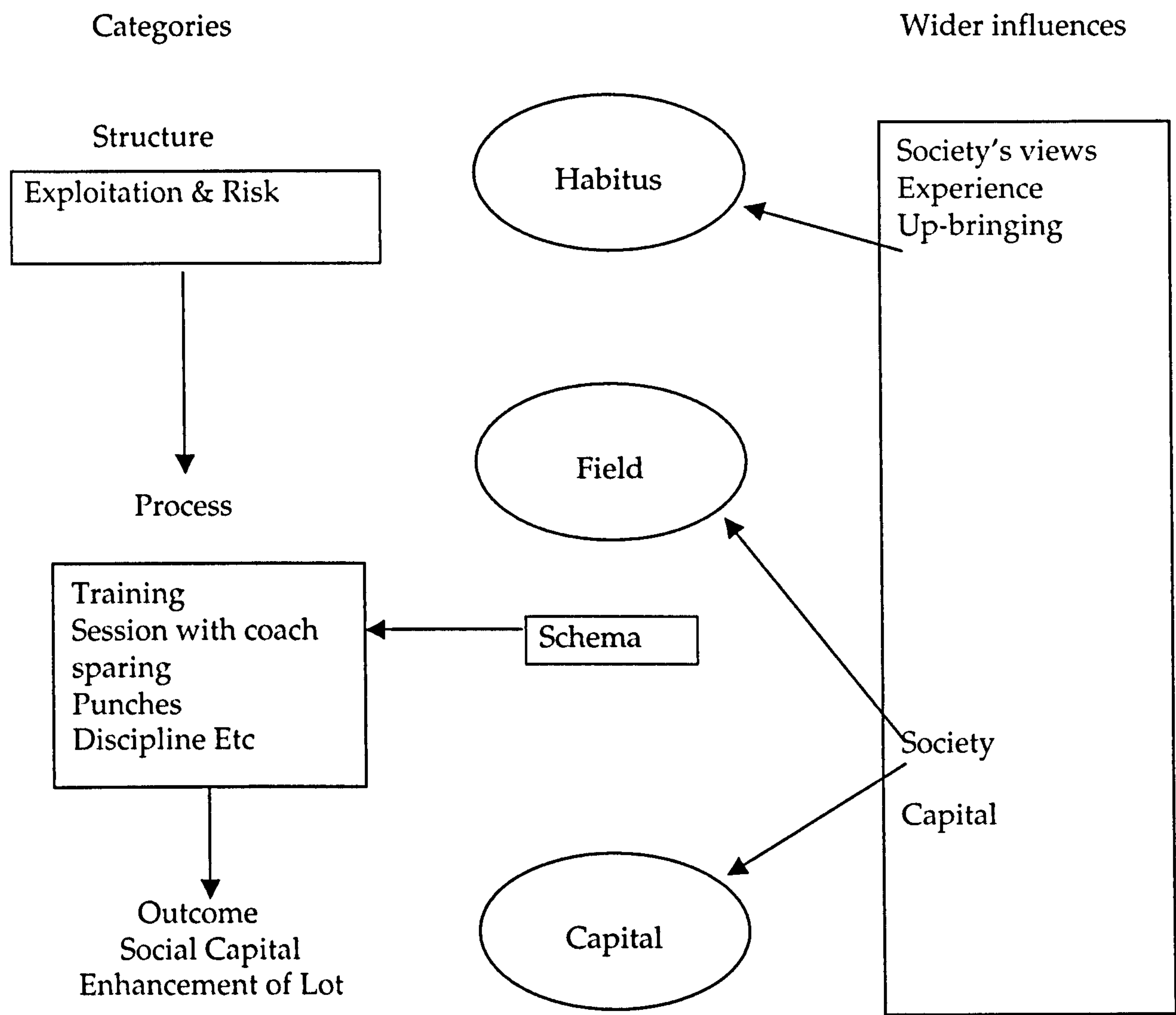


Figure 6 The relationship of the categories identified to habitus, capital and field

The main issue which arose from the analysis of the data is the interplay of social factors and the individual, even in something as seemingly physically focused as sport. The main concern or issue is that of social class and the ways in which class relations may be reinforced through sport and the engagement of the individual in sporting activities. The work of Bourdieu and particularly his concepts of habitus, capital and field are particularly helpful in focusing the discussion, as is his concept of schema. The use of these concepts as a means of structuring an investigation is central to Bourdieu who was clear that his theories were empirical in its orientation as outlined by Wacquant:

“It must be stressed that for Bourdieu the notion is first and foremost a stenographic manner of designing a research posture” (Wacquant, 2004:3a)

As a means of structuring and focusing the discussion on the findings, key propositions have been extracted from the data analysis. As a note of caution, it must be emphasised that this is a qualitative study and by definition the sample was small and focused. Generalisability is difficult to establish therefore, rather than make generalisable statements propositions can be drawn from the study. This represents generalisation at the theoretical level as opposed to the statistical level. The propositions are:

- Boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas, it is thought to provide a framework and structure for the boys and young men participating and can prevent trouble.
- There is an increasing number of middle class people becoming involved in boxing, the so-called “white collar” boxers, this is quite a different experience from the working class involvement.
- A schema is essential an aspect of boxing, even in an activity as physically focused and specific as boxing societal views and issues can still influence this activity.
- Exploitation and risk taking intrinsic aspects of professional and amateur boxing (certainly at the competition level).
- Engagement in the sport (boxing) did build up reserves of social capital and through this economic capital.

The following has been added, which did not clearly emerge from the data but can be theorised.

- Boxing, therefore, requires a particular habitus, in which risk and exploitation are seen as inevitable. Whilst engagement in boxing does enhance the individual’s life it does not lead to engagement in formal learning.

These propositions will be considered against the relevant literature. This necessitated new literature being introduced to develop the issues and ideas which emerged from the collection analysis of the data. The chapter will conclude by a review of the research questions and how they were addressed in through the study.



Life Long Learning

It was argued on page 21 that learning boxing would fall into the category of non-formal learning. Colley et al (2005) have identified the key concepts in the area, however their focus is primarily on formal versus informal learning. They provide (p. 19) a list of the ideal characteristics of formal and informal learning. It is useful to return to this list and to identify ways in which the characteristics of learning boxing can be considered these characteristics.

Formal	Informal
Teacher as authority	No teacher involved
Educational premises	Non-educational premises
Teacher control	Learner control
Planned and structured	Organic and evolving
Summative assessment/accreditation	No assessment
Externally determined objectives/outcomes	Internally determined objectives
Interests of powerful and dominant groups	Interests of oppressed groups
Open to all groups, according to published criteria	Preserves inequality and sponsorship
Propositional knowledge	Practical and process knowledge
High status	Low status
Education	Not education
Measured outcomes	Outcomes imprecise/unmeasurable
Learning predominantly individual	Learning predominantly communal
Learning to preserve status quo	Learning for resistance & empowerment
Pedagogy of transmission & control	Learner-centred, negotiated pedagogy
Learning mediated through agents of authority	Learning mediated through learner democracy
Fixed and limited time-frame	Open-ended engagement
Learning is the main explicit purpose	Learning is either of secondary significance or is implicit
Learning is applicable in a range of contexts	

Figure 7: Possible ideal-types of formal and informal learning

In boxing, teaching the teacher or the coach is the authority figure, the gym is an educational premise, the trainer/teacher has strong control, the sessions

are relatively planned and structured, arguably, the boxing match is a form of accreditation, and the Amateur Boxing Board and the British Board of Boxing Control are external reference points. It is, in principle open to all groups. As has been argued it is concerned with preserving the status quo and as such it exercises pedagogy of transmission and control, mediated through figures of authority, the coaches and the officials. Whilst, it is not as fixed as other forms of knowledge it is relatively structured.

The apparent characteristics of informal learning are: it is low status, not seen as education, though maintaining the status quo, it does preserve inequality and sponsorship, it is not seen as education and is content specific.

This study examined one sport and argued that learning the sport fits into a typology of non-formal learning. One cannot generalise and state that this applies to the learning of any sport. What can be considered are the issues that despite developing considerable skills, the transfer of (non-formal) learning did not seem to take place, nor did engagement in the sport seem to empower people in a way which would raise their educational expectations? Reasons why this should be will be considered in this chapter.

## Field

*Boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas, it is thought to provide a framework and structure for the boys and young men participating and can prevent trouble.*

This particular inference will be considered within the context of field. Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) defines field as the medium for the distribution of capital, and in this context field can represent both the global aspects of society as well as narrower and more specific areas of practice. In discussing field, Bourdieu draws the analogy of a game and each player having specific amounts of capital which he both spends and gains through interaction with the field. As this is a particular powerful metaphor it is worth re-quoting...

“we can picture each player as having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colours, each colour corresponding to a different species of capital she holds, so that the relative force in the game, her position in the state of play, also her strategic orientation to the game.... Depending both on the total number of tokens and the piles of tokens she retains, that is the volume and structure of the capital.

“Players can play to increase or to conserve their capital, their number of tokens, in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisite reproduction of the game and its stakes.” (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:99)



Field can refer to either the society in which the individual lives and function, or to a specific situation, such as, in this instance, boxing.

Sugden (1996) makes the point that (professional) boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas- as is evidenced in the banning of professional boxing in the economically robust Sweden and Norway. Whilst, Sugden was not writing in the tradition of Bourdieu, he argues that boxing flourishes in a poor economic climate, in which risk and exploitation are a central part of everyday life. Sugden (1996) also developed the notion of the differing fields of boxing. He followed his original study by exploring boxing in Cuba and in Northern Ireland and found very clear differences between these areas. Cuban boxing was very much tied in with state philosophy and emphasis on exercise. Northern Ireland the boxing club was an oasis of calm against a background of sectarianism. However, despite these differences, there are a commonality which is about boxing clubs providing a refuge in a harsh world. Wacquant (1992) emphasises this in his study of boxing in a Chicago ghetto. Sugden (1996) argues that the survival of boxing is dependent on the view of it as a social good, and that despite this altruism, amateur boxing is also very much a stable for the budding professional.

The area in which this study took place was the North East of England. Its particular economic changes and employment changes are fairly well documented: the heavy industries of coal mining and ship building have virtually disappeared which has led to changes in employment patterns. Nayak (2003) presents a profile of the North East and argues that it has changed from a stable working environment in which employment is relatively stable to one in which the situation is somewhat patchy. Through his ethnographic study he found that white, working class young men no longer had the support of a structured working environment in which traditional masculine values were celebrated. The young men in his study reacted by an exaggerated display of masculinity, which was acted out through engagement in football, "nights out with the lads" and alleged superiority over other cultures.

This pattern is not peculiar to the North East; Willis, (1977); Charlesworth (2000) and McDowell (2003) have detailed these changes and the effects which they can have on working class young men. The types of job open to the young men are very different from the relatively stable employment opportunities of the previous generation. Lowly paid, temporary jobs are often all that is open to young men with no real academic qualifications. The result is that many of them are seen as troublesome and are not keen to engage in regular work. Charlesworth (2000), in particular, highlights the disempowerment of the working classes. However, this trend is not inevitable as pointed out by McDowell (2002) who found that many of the young men constructed themselves as masculine and dependable.

It is boys and young men from this type of background who are recruited into the amateur clubs in the North East. In the northern region of the Amateur Boxing Association (England) there are 55 boxing clubs, and it is the largest region in the country. It is logical to relate this to Nayak's findings and argue that participation in boxing is a way of developing and maintaining a masculine identity, in a situation of economic change where traditional masculine roles are absent.

Working class engagement is built up around structured amateur involvement, from the dabbler to the gifted professional. For working class people an involvement in boxing usually starts in boyhood. It is clear that there is the assumption both from politicians, the general public and the boxers themselves that this participation can prevent the boys from getting into trouble. It makes for a structured, time occupying activity and also has character building properties (Bourdieu, 1978a). In the findings of my research whilst this could be the case, some respondents whilst acknowledging boxing as a good character building thing to do, saw amateur boxing as an end in itself. Whether it actually prevented the young men from getting into trouble is difficult to ascertain. Arguably, the boys and young men, involved in boxing, would have found some other constructive way of spending their time; also some did fall by the wayside and drop out of boxing. The perceptions are, nevertheless, boxing is a way of preventing trouble and, to some, it gives it a *raison d'être*.

This pattern did represent many of the settings (or fields) I encountered and, to a degree, the Fight Club. The boxing club was a secure environment, well run and organised. It presented a degree of control and structure which was lacking for the young men who hang out around the street corners. Engagement in boxing did provide a structured and disciplined activity and camaraderie with the other young men. The trainer had to exercise a degree of control. For instance Charlie (a trainer) told me that if a young lad would not submit to the discipline and say, started to backchat, he would be required to leave the club. There was something of this in many of the clubs and people I met in the context of my research. It has been previously argued that this is perhaps an approach suited to a particular type of habitus.

The working class respondents, for example Anthony, Al and Marty, saw boxing as an activity which steered them towards the so-called straight and narrow, and they all cited examples of friends who were not engaged in such a purposeful activity and who entered a life of crime. It is almost impossible to determine if the engagement in boxing was a factor which prevented crime; it could well be that such individuals would inevitably find a purposeful occupation. Wacquant (1992) found that his boxers were from the more organised representatives of their class and it could well be that a particular habitus is necessary *for* rather than resulting *from* boxing.



## White Collar Boxing

*There is an increasing number of middle class people becoming involved in boxing, the so-called "white collar" boxers, this is quite a different experience from the working class involvement.*

Through my engagement in boxing I found that the so-called "white collar" fields, certainly in the North East of England, were very different and tend to be associated with fairly up-market gymnasiums. The middle class experience of boxing and engagement in the sport tends to come about through an interest in boxing, or some boxing moves, used in exercise, which then lead to a more active participation.

Social class and sport is an area that has been considered by, for example, Bourdieu (1978) and Wilson (2002). Clements (1995) in his sociological study came up with the notion of a "sports career": at different stages of their lives, different people engage in different sports. He gives the example of the son of a Spanish immigrant (to France) who moves from rugby (at school) to judo to aikido (at university). This has relevance to this study, as many of the men engaged in boxing because of the challenges it presented. Certainly, this pattern was seen very clearly in the respondents who participated in my study.

It would seem that an explanation of middle class participation comes from the fitness industry's continual search for novelty (Sugden, 1996). Techniques used in boxing training have been incorporated into structured fitness regimes. So-called Boxercise, circuits designed around boxing training, are also used as these regimes require a high level of physical energy. Whilst boxercise and the use of boxing moves in exercise are so dissimilar to an actual boxing match as to be almost another sporting activity, they can lead to a more active involvement in boxing. The men I met who engaged in boxing in white collar situations came to it through this avenue. Sugden (1996) states this as one reason for the increase in women boxers; women quite like the activity and can do something to demonstrate their prowess.

In the observational part of my study, I observed both settings and this allowed me to compare white collar boxers with those from a more traditional (working class) background. An important difference was that, on occasions, white collar participants rode roughshod over the rules. In amateur and professional boxing there is a high degree of organisation: the Amateur Boxing Association and the British Board of Boxing Control set out a highly structured set of rules and regulations. However, in the white collar boxing settings I encountered, these rules were virtually ignored. For example, on occasions head guards and gum shields were not worn when sparring; this was compulsory in amateur and professional situations.

Participation in boxing reinforces class relations in other ways: for middle class men, boxing activities are a means of keeping fit and developing themselves in terms of positive health and enhanced physical appearance. Whereas for those engaging in boxing via more traditional routes, boxing was an end in itself; for Al and the others who went on to develop their careers as professional boxers it was an extremely serious business. It was also a strong theme I noted in my observations. This argument is developed by Shilling (1991), who argues that the approach to the body is class related, with working class approaches being concerned with the body as a means to an end, whilst the middle class approach sees the body as an end in itself. This can be mapped on to boxing, as indicated above – the working class approach sees boxing as a means to make money and as a means of advancement.

It was not quite that straightforward, as while boxing for the white collar participants was a means of keeping fit rather than making their fortune, indirectly their careers could benefit from their engagement in the sport as it can be surmised that the high levels of fitness meant they presented with a general appearance of health and fitness. In the past 20 years or so, there has been an emphasis on the relationship between health, fitness and physical activity, which is seen as positive and health promoting. People are judged on the basis of their physical appearance (Maguire, 2002). Physical fitness is a sign of positive well-being, and boxing is a means of keeping fit and looking good. Improved appearance and a sense of physical well-being could improve the middle class participants' progression along a career path. Whilst this notion was not validated in the interviews, it did raise an interesting area that could usefully be further explored.

Another, perhaps more obvious difference was the presence of both men and women. In amateur and professional boxing, while there are an increasing number of female participants, the environments observed were exclusively male. One respondent, Mark, who ran an amateur club, told me that when one young man brought his girlfriend the others were displeased and let their annoyance be known (although when another lad brought his stunningly attractive girlfriend, their displeasure was not so evident). In white collar situations, the men would sometimes spar with the women. I got a sense that the men were trying in some way to prove their masculinity. I did not get this sense at all in the professional or amateur situations, where masculinity seemed almost to be taken for granted and whilst boxing was a way of enhancing masculinity it was not really about proving it. In his novel *Fight Club*, Palahniuk (1997) describes a club where young men can participate in fights, not in the boxing sense but a raw and aggressive type of fighting. Kusz (2002) analyses the film, and therefore implicitly critiques the book, and argues that participation in these fights gives the men a sense of masculinity that has been eroded in their work and home lives. Similarly, the working class involvement could be about maintaining a sense of masculinity in an



environment in which traditional masculine values are changed.

Although the settings were different, in many ways the motivation for engaging in boxing was similar, that is it could advance an improvement in physique, better the individual's career and enhance a sense of masculinity. Yet the expression and involvement were quite different. Bourdieu's metaphor of "chips" (outlined on page 120) can explain this difference of expression. The improvement of physique and of fitness levels adds to one's supply of chips, but chips of a particular type. The added chips do little to change the rules of the game. In the case of the working class boxer, whilst he gains a high level of skill there is nothing in the process of learning the skill that allows him to see the wider perspective or meta-skills that will enable him to transfer them to other areas of his life. In other words, the field (of boxing) does not alter his habitus. Society's rules seem to be all-persuasive and this will be considered in the next section where the impact of society on the schema will be explored.

## Schema

*A schema is essential an aspect of boxing, even in an activity as physically focused and specific as boxing, societal views and issues can still influence this activity.*

To develop this idea I would like to examine the notion of schema in more detail and demonstrate the ways in which it can develop within a societal context; in particular, in the context of habitus and field. Further consideration will be concerned with the ways in which transferability can be made explicit, and thereby could lead to further learning and thus enhance the lives of the participants. The term schema is explicitly used by both Bourdieu and Wacquant and is also a popular term used both in cognitive and sports psychology (Magill, 1998); it is worth unpicking the different uses of this technical term.

In this context schema can be defined as a mental map or cognitive pattern of an event that can be sequenced in a certain way through a series of neural networks determining the ways in which these events are acted out. General rules are established that facilitate skill development (Magill, 2001, Schmidt and Lee, 1999). An alternative approach is the concept that motor actions are grounded in physical actions, and laws and motor actions are developed from practice rather than a schema (Newell, 1985). In both these frameworks the concept is very different from instinctive response; it might not be conscious but is the result of a highly focused mental pattern.

A full study and exploration of the concept of schema (in the sense outlined above) is outside the focus of this study; nevertheless, the concept of a schema must be acknowledged. Its particular relevance lies in the view that whether one accepts the notion of schema or not, there must be a particular focus for

the co-ordination of physical activity. Bourdieu does not discount the notion of a mental pattern. He refers to the use of the body in focus sports as using the “corporate intelligence” (Bourdieu, 1997). But, as one would expect, he brings in the social dimension and emphasises the linkage of the social and the cognitive, in particular the incorporation of social rules as part of the schema.

This is important, as Bourdieu maintains that one can learn many of the social rules through the body. An example of this is the increasingly subtle gender pattern in sitting, standing and so on, and through learning these social rules one’s social identity as male or female is reinforced (Bourdieu, 1997). As he puts it:

“We learn bodily, the social order inscribes itself in our body” (Bourdieu, 1997: 141).

Wacquant takes a similar viewpoint in his use of the term schema in the context of boxing, and the subsequent skill development, which requires years and years of dedication. Sugden, in the quotation below, summarises the importance of disposition and approach, almost as a prerequisite for a particular schema:

“The principles of pleasure which motivated him as a child have to be re-negotiated in the unfamiliar in terms of stoicism and deferred gratification. He has to develop and hone his maturing muscles, work on his stamina. Expand his cardiovascular endurance, watch his weight, develop fast hands and learn to give and take hard punches to the body and head. Regular road running, diet, self-denial, self control and much longer nightly work outs in the gym are essential features of the serious boxers' descriptive. It is at this time, when boxing begins to really hurt both inside and outside the ring, that most youngsters quit.” (Sugden, 1996: 100).

Additionally, boxing is a highly focused mechanistic activity in that punching requires a focused and definite movement. In other words. a neuro-muscular pathway is set up in the brain and muscles. It takes many hours of practice to make this automatic. My field notes are full of complaints of how difficult, if not impossible, this particular skill is to learn. The boxer has to defend and attack simultaneously, which makes this incredibly difficult to learn.

To summarise, a particular schema or mental map has to be developed to achieve a degree of success in boxing. This requires practice and commitment, in terms of the hours of practice required, but the young man engaging in boxing also has to commit himself to learning, to keeping fit and to eating healthily. The young boxer commits himself to this way of life at a point when his peers are discovering drink and girls. The boxer puts himself under the



disciplined rule of his trainer, in a manner comparable to a novice monk (thus Wacquant's imagery). Boxing also requires a degree of emotional control: the boxer cannot allow himself to become angry and has to work at controlling his emotions. He has, therefore, to use emotional labour as part of his craft (Hochschild, 1983). The degree of physical fitness attained by the boxer also requires knowledge of the workings of the human body. Techniques of learning through observing and working with other people are developed as well as through reflection on past experience.

Bourdieu's concept that a schema or the development of a schema involves the learning of a series of social rules is outlined in Sugden's definition. In this instance it also incorporates a very high degree of commitment and this is worth considering further. A good example of this was my informant, Marty, a professional boxer, who spoke at length of the commitment and self-denial he underwent when preparing for a boxing match.

As has been argued, boxing is also very much class linked, although the social classes are involved in quite different ways. Although there is a tradition of boxing in public schools, it is generally perceived as a working class sport. Its ethos is seen as working class youths entering the sport and being given a discipline and structure that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives. This is reflected in contemporary writing on boxing. Anasi (2003), for example, writes about boxing allowing people (that is, working class males) to develop middle class structure and values. Boxing does instil a structure and a discipline in the lives of the young men involved. The very nature of the organisation of amateur boxing is about instilling a disciplined approach. It is about the development of habitus and a controlled habitus which places value on discipline and work. This idea is developed in the next section.

## Habitus

Sport (boxing) takes place in the context of a social space (Bourdieu, 1997), which is made up of what is basically the structure of society. And it is a structure that is dependent on people knowing their place within this framework. In other words, the habitus mediates the positions an individual takes in society or in the social space.

It is proposed that:

- Boxing, therefore, requires a particular habitus, in which risk and exploitation are seen as inevitable. Whilst engagement in boxing does enhance the individual's life it does not lead to engagement in formal learning.

In this context it is, therefore, important to revisit the notion of habitus, described by Bourdieu as:

“The notion of habitus has been used innumerable times in the past, by authors as different as Hegel, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim, and (Marcel) Mauss, all of whom used it in a more or less methodical way.

However, it seems to me that, in all cases, those who used the notion did so with the same theoretical intention in mind.... I wanted to insist on the *generative capacities* of dispositions, it being understood that these are acquired, socially constituted dispositions.... I wanted to emphasize that this “creative,” active, inventive capacity was not that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition, but that of an active agent.... I wanted to insist on the “primacy of practical reason” that Fichte spoke of, and to clarify the specific categories of this reason...”.

(Bourdieu, 1990, 12-13)

Wacquant (2004) outlines in some detail the attributes of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. He argues that habitus is a mediation between the individual and the social, and is manifested by the particular outlook or, in his terminology, *disposition* of the individual. Whilst unique to the individual, it is nevertheless reflective of the social position of that individual. It is relatively stable over time and situation, although it is not immutable and can be changed or developed through situations in which the individual finds him or herself.

Wacquant (1992) touches on this when he suggests that the boxing club mirrors the ghetto, in that it refines and focuses the physical culture of violence inherent in the ghetto. The respondents I interviewed and observed were not from such a situation, and were from traditional working class backgrounds (or were explicitly middle class). Whilst one must be careful of over-generalisation, the working class culture can be a culture where physical force (violence is too strong a term) is not an unknown instance, as represented by children being hit by their parents, or by fighting in the playground. As such it could be part of the habitus, and therefore the boxing situation. It was not out of kilter with their habitus or the field in which they entered. Boxing could reflect these values, but it could focus and refine them.

On examining the life patterns of my key respondents, I have in table 4, (page 58) identified them as working or middle class. Engagement in boxing caused none of the individuals to alter their social class and, indeed, it reinforced their class position. This is illustrated by two of my respondents, Al and Dan, who both worked as fitness instructors yet clearly came from different social classes. Dan had a good educational background and a very different approach to his work and life in general than the more robust Al.

This point is further illustrated by the concepts of exploitation and risk. Exploitation is perhaps more focused on the professional boxer, although the



amateur can also be exploited by his club, as champions reflect well on the club. Risk can apply to both the amateur and professional alike. To develop this particular argument it is useful to explore Wacquant's ideas. He highlights stereotypical images of boxers held by many people (Wacquant, 1994). His study took place in the USA; in the UK the situation is no different, and the stereotype goes something like this:

Boxers are young men who are not very bright but have a high degree of strength. They wish to better themselves and see boxing as a way out of their economic situation. The managers and promoters of boxing are keen to exploit the boxers and make them engage in boxing matches for which the boxers earn little money in comparison to their manager. This leads them into potentially highly dangerous situations, and the majority end their career with a significant degree of physical injury. Many of them ending up as "punch drunk" or "punchy".

Wacquant, in developing the concept of body capital, particularly highlighted the ways in which others could use body capital developed by other people for their own financial gain. He does this both eloquently and strongly, and goes as far as to draw clear parallels between this type of activity and prostitution. He found that the boxers who were involved in his study used imagery drawn from animal husbandry, prostitution and slavery to describe their lot (Wacquant, 1998). All of this particular imagery is concerned with exploitation and a consciousness of being exploited.

An activity does not take place in a vacuum, and wider societal issues may be important. In the case of boxing, society does have a particular image and view of boxing. This idea is central to Sugden's theorisation of boxing (1996). Sugden argues that although boxing has (to some extent) the image of being an activity which aims to keep youths off the streets and engaged in a purposeful activity, it is nevertheless often a "farm" for managers/promoters to develop their up and coming professionals who will make them money. This phenomenon is fairly well documented, and indeed Sugden (1996) deals with this in some detail. In both the UK and USA, professional boxing is in the hands of a few promoters and managers. If a boxer reaches any status, he will most likely be managed by a major promoter, such as Frank Warren. In the USA, boxing at its highest level is virtually run by the notorious Don King. This means there is little room for the small time manager/promoter. It is also a highly exploitative environment, as is suggested both by anecdotal evidence and by high profile cases such as Don King accessing Mike Tyson's funds while he was in prison. According to the respondents in my research, it was always others who were exploitative; it was another manager, and the boxers themselves knew of someone who had a worse deal than them.

The proposition, from the analysis, will now be considered:

*Exploitation and risk taking are intrinsic aspects of professional and amateur boxing (certainly at the competition level).*

There is clear evidence (for example McRae, 1998) that exploitation in boxing could take place, but this is not quite the whole story. The reality of this exploitation was difficult to ascertain fully. It would seem that the small time boxers did not make much money and the cut of their manager/promoter was not really exploitative. Whilst the stakes were higher at the national level, champions such as Calzaghe and Hamed were far from impoverished. Sugden (1987) argued that amateur boxing was used as a "farm" for potential professionals. Yet only a small percentage of amateurs go on to become professional boxers. Also the relationship between manager/trainer and boxer is not quite as objective as it would initially seem. It often resembled that of father and son rather than money-maker and subject. It also does nothing to explain the phenomenon of white collar boxing.

From this study, although they acknowledged that exploitation did take place, the promoters interviewed gave no clear indication of a personal experience of exploitation. Questioning around this area was quite explicit, but at no time did a sense of exploitation of boxers by managers and promoters emerge. Admittedly, promoters and managers would be unlikely to consciously admit to the exploitation of others. Arguably, boxers would not acknowledge a sense of exploitation either, even to themselves. For example, Anthony said he had heard of others being exploited but he was lucky in that it did not happen to him.

Without access to financial information and exact figures, it is difficult either to prove or disprove these statements. Also, perceptions are important and it would seem that boxing is looked on as being exploitative in a way that other sports are not, and the reasons for this can usefully be explored. Boxing involves individuals in combat, one must demonstrate his superiority over the other, so there is an inevitable risk of injury. The man engaged in the sport is, so to speak, putting himself on the line. He is risking injury so that others (as well as himself) may benefit financially. This can lead to a sense of exploitation, reinforced by the various stories. It is more powerful than, say, in team sports where it is very much a team as opposed to an individual effort.

Whilst there is some evidence of exploitation, it also takes attention away from the combative element of boxing, where people try to inflict harm on their opponent. As illustrated by Elias and Dunning's argument (1974), as society becomes increasingly civilised it becomes less tolerant of brutal sports. Exploitation in a financial sense can divert attention away from the inherently brutal, or it can be a way of expressing an implicit disapproval.

In fact, most of the young men engaged in boxing are from working class



backgrounds and would be working in positions where others would profit from their labour. This was not really acknowledged, although the promoters and managers spoke at length about difficulties in making any money out of the sport. Classical Marxist theory, and particular notions of surplus labour when applied to this, can enhance our understanding of this particular phenomenon. Marx's argument is that profits to be made in capitalist society are made from the undervaluing and underpaying of labourers. Someone produces a good; their outlay is in raw material and labour. When the final good is produced, the bulk of the profit comes from the difference between the final product and the wages paid. This can be illustrated as follows: audiences at boxing matches tend to be predominantly financially secure individuals, and many are middle class, and this adds to the sense of 'exploitation' - one class being used for another's entertainment and benefit. Sugden (1996) makes the point very strongly that boxing exists in a climate where social deprivation is clearly present, and the boxers may see boxing as way out, only to end up in an exploitative situation. Subsequent developments of Marxist thought have made this argument more sophisticated, but it still holds good in the area of body capital (and indeed prostitution). Basically, if you are in a particular class position, it is inevitable that others will profit by your labour.

Although some of Bourdieu's work does relate to Marxist theory, in that he did not ignore the economic dominance of the ruling classes. Bourdieu is perhaps more strongly linked to Weberian thought, as he emphasised a whole series of factors which he called cultural; capital as determining and defining the ruling classes. Unlike Marx, Weber did not specifically address issues of exploitation. However, Wright (2002) has explored Weber's work and considered his particular use of the concept of exploitation of one social class by another. He concludes that Weber's concept of class is improvised and that Weber treated exploitation as a "problem of technical efficiency and economic rationality" (p832). The worker had to work for more than just himself and therefore had to develop the correct attitude to work; the post-industrial revolution worker was controlled by instilling in them the Protestant work ethic.

This is of particular interest to this study as it highlights two areas: people are not necessarily aware of being exploited; and workers can be controlled through the development of the correct attitude. Much of boxing is about discipline and developing a strong work ethic. The discipline and development of fitness is necessary to be at all successful as a boxer but, as Sugden (1996) points out, boxing is tolerated despite its violence as it is seen as a way of keeping young men out of trouble. The discipline of boxing can also be seen as instilling a work ethic in the working class young man who will fit into employment.

In developing this category there seemed to be an almost fatalistic acceptance



that someone else would gain from the boxer's labour, and that this was inevitable. The respondents from the lower socio-economic groups did not have particularly high expectations, and the attitude seemed to be that boxing could represent a way of getting "a few quid", and if they were ripped off then "that's life".

My consideration of the category of risk also developed this argument. Opponents of boxing mainly argue against it on the basis that it can be physically harmful to its participants, and any possible positive features are outweighed by the negative aspects of this potential physical harm, specifically brain damage. Within the past 10 years or so there have been high profile cases where a boxer has been seriously injured in the ring, such as Gerard McClelland and Michael Watson. There are also numerous reports of boxers left "punchy" or punch-drunk after a career in boxing. The medical evidence would suggest that it can be argued that injuries as a result of boxing are to a large extent inevitable. This is reinforced by the aspect of boxing which makes people uncomfortable: that inflicting harm is the *raison d'être* of the sport. As Sugden states:

"Whereas in almost all other sports injuries are results of unintentional actions (or wilful actions outside the rules of the sport), in boxing it is argued the more successful a fighter is, the more likely he will seriously injure his opponent" (Sugden, 1996: 174).

Despite this, and the cases mentioned above, in the immediate term boxing is comparatively safe. Other sports contain a much higher risk of injury. For instance, in soccer there are 35 injuries for every 10,000 participants, compared with three in boxing (British Board of Boxing Control, 2003). However, there is stronger evidence for the long term detrimental effects of boxing. To explore this area it is important to examine the evidence base of risks in boxing and a brief outline of the main studies into the detrimental effects of boxing, mainly around its effects on the brain (see figure 8).

Martland (1928) was the first to identify the so-called "punch-drunk syndrome" in former boxers, although the expression was in current use prior to this. He identified the symptoms as: unsteadiness in gait, distinct leg dragging, loss of muscle movements, hesitation, a Parkinson-like syndrome and mental deterioration.

Mawdsley and Fergusson (1963) further elaborated this syndrome. Basing their findings on observation of 10 former boxers, they found: extrapyramidal side-effects, cerebral dysfunction, dysarthria, ataxia and tremors. Using air encephalography they found evidence of brain atrophy in these boxers as well as dementia and personality changes.

Roberts (1969) studied a random sample of 250 former professional boxers, registered between 1925 and 1955. He examined them clinically and carried out electro-encephalograms on 168 cases. He found that in 37 former boxers there were clear indications of a clinical syndrome in keeping with the other findings; this was around 17% of the sample. Johnson (1969) found the following psychiatric symptoms: a chronic amnesiac state; dementia; morbid jealousy; and uncontrolled outbursts.



Corsallis et al (1973), in post mortem examination of 15 former boxers, identified septal abnormalities and Parkinsonism, as demonstrated by neural degeneration and loss of pigment in the substantia nigra and neurofibrillary tangles (throughout the cerebral cortex and the brain stem) similar to those found in Alzheimer's disease, but without the characteristic senile plaques.

The septal abnormalities were, in particular, evidence of septum fenestration. Normally, there are twin sheets of nervous tissue which are fused; in these boxers they were separated (Corsallis et al used 500 brains as a control and found this pattern unique to the boxers). Maudsley and Ferguson argue that a blow to the head can lead to a rise in pressure, which can cause this rupture of the septum leaves. Corsallis et al conclude by stating that the boxers in their study had more than 330 fights, and clearly the fewer the fights the less the neurological damage.

Casson et al (1984) reported an unpublished survey of 165 neurologists who reported 290 cases of "punch-drunk syndrome" compared to six cases in footballers. Yet Thomasson et al (1979) compared 53 football players and amateur boxers and found no statistical differences, other than left hand motor function being slightly impaired in the amateur boxers.

Amateur boxing has also been an area of comparison, and a study by Rodrigues et al (1983) found abnormal CBF in professional boxers but normal levels in amateurs. Matser et al (2000) specifically studied 38 amateur boxers and used a control group of 28 (amateur boxers). They tested their group shortly before and after a match. They argue that there is a degree of brain damage in amateur boxers, although they did not follow up their sample.

Casson et al (1984) studied 18 former boxers and active boxers using CAT scans, neurophysiological examination and psychometric testing. They found that 87% of boxers had some abnormal results, although they did not specify the degree.

It would seem that serious injury to the head, whilst a distinct possibility, is comparatively rare. The longer term sequelae are slightly more problematic and require some consideration. The early studies were based on people with established brain disorder under professional care. There is no indication of how commonplace this syndrome disorder is among boxers as a whole. An important exception to this is Roberts (1969) who found 17% of his sample had significant brain impairment. The studies were based on comparatively small samples, which raises issues about generalisation. The more recent studies (Matser and Casson) indicate a degree of brain damage, but fail to indicate the extent or seriousness. It is particularly difficult to draw definitive conclusions; a meta analysis is difficult as the studies used very different methodologies. However, it would seem that while engagement in boxing can lead to brain damage to a fairly significant degree, this is by no means inevitable, and the degree of long-term damage can also be linked to the number of fights. Today, professional boxers are subject to strict scrutiny and medical examinations, and if they are losing fights their situation is reviewed by the British Board of Boxing Control. A similar arrangement exists for amateur boxers.

### Figure 8 Medical evidence in boxing

The studies, outlined in figure 7, would indicate that there is a degree of brain damage as a result of engagement in boxing. However, this is by no means inevitable and the British Board of Boxing Control argues that measures such as control over licence to box and regular brain scans are



strong preventative measures. They also state that, statistically, boxing is safer than many other sports.

There is some ambiguity in the available literature as to whether or not sportsmen (and women) are more or less risk-prone than their peers. Peritti-Watel et al (2004), for example, argue that young athletes may have a healthier lifestyle than their peers and are less likely to smoke and eat convenience foods than their peers. Conversely, sport (all sport, not just boxing) is associated with many risky behaviours, and it could be argued that sport can legitimise risk, which is associated with masculinity (Lyng, 1990).

Like much around the subject, the important feature lies not only in the objective facts but also in people's perceptions. The risks were not seriously considered by any of the boxers encountered in the course of the present study. It would seem that boxing is associated with risk. The response of those engaged in boxing when this risk was considered was a contextualisation, that is to say "well, other areas of life contain risks and what is to say that boxing is any different; things happen to people anyway and, yes, boxing may be risky but so is life in general". Ged, in particular highlighted this approach and he told me that, despite his many boxing matches, his only serious injury was when he was run over by a car.

This approach to risk, especially among young males, is fairly well documented (for example, Waldron, 1995 and 1986). One can also speculate that the approach to risk carries with it some of the inevitability of being working class – working class males engage in traditionally risky occupations. Is boxing really any different to this? To return to the notion of habitus: is the working class habitus conditioned to tolerate or accept risk?

## Capital

It is useful to revisit the notion of capital before illustrating the ways in which boxing can seem to add to the capital of the individual. Skeggs (1997) provides a useful synopsis of the different types of capital: cultural capital refers to the extent to which the individual matches the values, mores and manners of the dominant class. There are three aspects to cultural capital: embodied, that is the particular mind-body dispositions; the objectified state, the particular material and cultural goods of the individual; and the institutionalised state, the credentials and goods possessed by the individual, for example academic qualifications. Social capital is the particular human resources and networks on which the individual draws. I would also add body/physical capital to this, that is the extent to which the body can be used as capital.

Capital as outlined so far can be an abstract concept and it is only of use if used in conjunction with the concept of field. Cultural, social and body capital



must therefore be turned into symbolic capital, that is other people must perceive that the possession of particular capital can increase the social worth of the individual. The ways in which capital increases the economic base of the individual or, more crudely, the ways in which capital is turned into hard cash is also important.

The central question of the study is a consideration of the ways in which body capital interacts with other types of capital and, specifically, how it can enhance the cultural capital of the individual. It has been agued that despite the skilled nature of boxing, the habitus of the individual remains unaltered. The particular trajectory can be described as follows:

Once the transition has passed from a boy involved in boxing to the young man beginning to compete, a serious and dedicated approach is essential. Both a high level of physical fitness and a degree of skill in boxing are essential prerequisites. Wacquant points out that this skill is not without cost, and indeed maintains it has a quasi-religious feel. There is a degree of active choice in this process, and many do not make the grade. There is also, sometimes, a dipping in and out of the process, but through the engagement in boxing serious body capital is being developed. If one were to plot a continuum of the process it would be represented as:

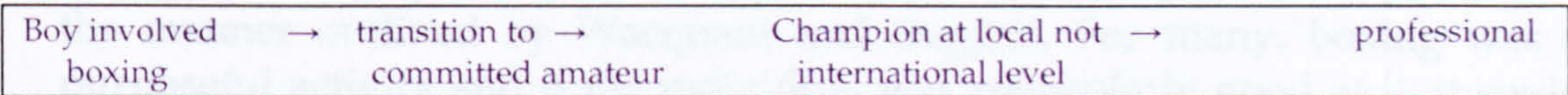


Figure 9 A boxing trajectory<sup>12</sup>

In the UK, the stereotype of a boxer, whether amateur or professional, is a working class young man, black or white, from an inner city council estate, destined for a life of crime, nowadays possibly involving drugs. Through the intervention of a boxing coach, or involvement in a boxing club, he becomes focused and devoted to his sport. He is now on the straight and narrow and begins to live a focused life. Some, of course, may fall by the wayside and revert to their former life, but not all.

Tied in with this is the exploitative climate: those running the boxing clubs are not entirely interested in saving someone from a life of crime but rather in the club being a training ground for the up-and-coming professional, who is selected and nurtured. The boxer, unless he reaches the upper ranks of boxing, is exploited and uses and abuses his body for the financial gains of others. Sugden (1987) outlines this phenomenon in some detail in his ethnographic study of a boxing gym in Hartford, Connecticut.

This outline is, of course, a simplification of a much more complex process, but it is nevertheless a fairly true and accurate representation of the public

<sup>12</sup> The literature review contains a detailed outline of this process: (Sugden, 1987)



image of boxing. In fact many of my respondents (for example, Ged) outlined a very similar picture of what boxing is for many young men. He did not deal with the exploitative aspects, but focused on the positive force it can be for many. Evidence from previous research, from my research and from anecdotal accounts of public perceptions all highlights these aspects.

Many do not follow this course but drop off at various stages. Of those interviewed, Al, Anthony and Marty followed this path, but others (Dan and Gary, for instance) played at being committed amateurs. To return to the capital metaphor they had varying degrees of body capital, from a few chips to the jackpot.

The notion of improving this, of finding a way out of the predicament into which one is born, is a very strong theme. In both the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant, the ways in which the individual is used by others for their advantage is identified. From my engagement in the process of boxing and my analysis of the data I did not gain a strong sense of exploitation. It would be naive to assume that all the trainers were involved for purely altruistic motives, but there was a sense of encouragement and interest in the boxers. However, the boxers were not from the margins of society, but rather from traditional working class stock. The North East of England has above-average levels of unemployment, but boxing was not seen as a way out of poverty in the manner outlined by Wacquant and Sugden. For many, boxing was a purposeful activity and if the individual was particularly good at it, it could lead to a professional boxing career. Boxing could give the young man some "street cred" and its benefits could be much more subtle.

There also was a very strong notion that engagement in boxing could keep people out of trouble. Many of the trainers saw themselves more as social workers (as illustrated by Phil, one of the respondents and Brendan Ingles, the manager of Naseem Hamed). This argument is powerful, but the reasons for taking up boxing were many and complex: it was part of cultural tradition, something males in particular families would engage in; it was a response to being bullied at school; fathers felt the need to toughen up their sons and sent them to boxing (Gary, for example); serendipity (Anthony happened to chance on a boxing club); or role modelling, their brothers were involved (Al, Rick). Therefore, it is difficult to prove whether or it not prevented trouble. Not everyone from a council estate ends up in some type of trouble with the law. Arguably, the successful boxers could have found another way of developing themselves. Wacquant points out that commitment to boxing demands an organisation and structure not found in people existing in the margins of society. This is similar to the situation which I found. The people I met and interviewed were not, and could not have been classified, as the so-called underclass. Boxing for them represented working class tradition and was one which enhanced their lives in varied ways.



If one takes cultural capital as the extent to which an individual has skills that can be measured against the requirements of the ruling classes, the development of boxing skills in the form of body capital does seem to reinforce the class position that an individual will hold in society. The answer must be no, body capital does not lead to an increase of cultural capital, certainly for the working classes. It has also been argued that the habitus of the individual remains unchanged.

In terms of Life Long Learning, engagement in boxing demands an increased learning curve and the skills of disciplined approach. The ability to control emotion would stand the individual in good stead should he engage in formal education. However, there was no evidence that engagement in boxing led to engagement in education. One of the respondents, John, did state that through his involvement in boxing he read about Muhammad Ali, which in turn led him to read about some of the wider issues around Ali's life, such as race relations. I found that this was the exception rather than the rule.

## Social Capital

The second form of capital that is worth considering is social capital, and in discussing the ways in which boxing could enhance their lives the boxers all commented on the relationships and networks which they were able to build and develop, in other words the social capital they developed through boxing. The final proposition: *engagement in the sport (boxing) did build up reserves of social capital and through this economic capital*, will be considered in this section.

Foley and Edwards (1999) both methodically and explicitly explore and analyse the concept of social capital. In so doing they make an important distinction in the use of the term social capital. They argue that social capital can be used as a dependent or an independent variable. They are, of course, using the term 'variable' in a broader sense than its (perhaps correct) usage in experimental research. By social capital as an independent variable they mean the building of social capital as a factor which leads to change in some people's lives (change being the dependent variable). Social capital as an independent variable would indicate that social capital is a result of the educational process.

Social capital, some would argue, can be a means of establishing an educational setting; that is, within the context of a network of relationships, individuals can learn. (Another way of putting this is that through social capital a learning climate is created.) The theories of Lave and Wenger (1991) are influential in this context; they emphasise the social aspects and social dimensions of learning. They maintain that learning takes place within a community of practice, and that the process of learning is very much part of a socialisation process into an occupation or a profession. So the development of social capital is important to facilitate learning, and it is through the

creation of links and networks that learning is developed. It was clear in the development of the ideas inherent in this study that those engaging in boxing were very much in a community of practice in a real and focused manner, both in traditional and white collar boxing. This was illustrated in the consideration of schema. Society's views can be transposed on to the schema, as the boxing schema is mediated and socialised to make it more palatable to society.

It can be concluded that social capital can be built and developed in the context of the gym and of learning to box. However, this type of social capital is only useful if it can be translated into something that will benefit and enhance the life of the participants, either in terms of economic or symbolic capital. This begs the question: does engagement in boxing develop social capital? In other words, does social capital build up networks and relationships that will enhance and develop opportunities for either communities or individuals?

The aspects of social capital concerned with the building up of communities were difficult to assess within the context of the study. When considering social capital as a result from participation in boxing on an individual level, the data suggests that social capital did result from engagement in boxing. There is some evidence from the analysis of the data of this (page 109). It is demonstrated in the ways in which building up networks of people could assist and enhance a whole variety of activities. For example, when I interviewed Gerry, who was rushing off to help a young boxer in an employment tribunal, it is apparent that he had quite considerable skills which would have greatly assisted this young man.

The trainer at the Fight Club, part of the observational setting, almost exclusively used his contacts in the club to develop his business. He even used me to help with the accreditation of a fitness programme. This is where the boundaries of traditional and 'white collar' boxing overlapped: both were venues for social capital, which gave people a chance to develop or, sometimes, to get out of a mess. Another example of this was Al, who obtained a job as a fitness instructor on the basis of his contacts in boxing, a move which he saw as 'life enhancing' and which led to other possibilities in his life. It can also be concluded that the development of this social capital led to economic success and did much to build economic capital, this point is detailed in Chapter 4.

In conclusion, social capital was a very strong category in the research. Boxing allowed networking and development of a group of people who could, in a variety of ways, enhance the individual's life. To return to Bourdieu's metaphor of poker chips, the individual is given several red chips (denoting social capital) which he can use in other areas of his life to increase his bargaining powers. The findings also raised many interesting questions for



me: at the start of the research I was of the strong opinion that learning in any sense would lead to a thirst for formal learning, and the individuals would immediately wish for a form of certificated learning. This was not the case, However, the acknowledgement of some form of development and creation of opportunities was strongly apparent. This now leads to a return to a specific consideration of the issues around Life Long Learning

### **Life long Learning.**

I would like to argue that much of the theorisation does not really address the issues of the transfer of skills from non-formal or informal learning (Alheit, 2002) to formal learning. Although people may unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, bring skills and attributes from other areas of their lives to formal learning, it is not done in a focused or conscious manner. It has been argued in the literature review that educational requirements are focused on so-called “soft skills” or narrow, job specific skills and that in this climate the wider implications of engagement in learning have not had the chance to develop (Young, 1998; Edwards, 1994).

There is a debate within the literature about the value of learning for its own sake and the current trend for narrow and job focused qualifications (Forrester and Payne, 2000). This narrow focus does very little to address any of the wider issues around society, and the transfer of knowledge from one area to another is lost. As Hodgkinson et al (2002) point out, the experiential or practical learning needs to be encapsulated in competencies or in reflection and evaluation. In boxing this does not really happen. The learning is not made conscious or identified. The holistic performance, while extremely important, could usefully be broken down and individual skill attributes could be acknowledged. The National Boxing Academy, whilst laudable in many ways, does not fully explore this transferability and acknowledgement of learning, although its basic concept is that the students develop boxing skills at the same time as achieving academic success. The two areas were considered to be quite separate and yet there could be opportunities to explore the transferability of learning and relate learning in sport to other types of learning in a more formal sense.

This is particularly important today as Field (2001), based on ideas of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), argues that knowledge management and how information can be accessed is becoming increasingly important. Risk is another factor. People can be reluctant to place themselves in the hands of one company, but have to develop transferable skills (my words). The skills learned through sport, in this case boxing, could be used to advantage if people's learning and the skills they have achieved were acknowledged, and ways in which this could be transferred were identified. This could be a powerful tool.

Another area of research is “learning careers”, which attempts to take a biographical approach to learning (for example, Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000). Bloomer, whose concept of learning careers was developed within the context of an empirical study carried out in a further education setting, bases this on the work of Bourdieu (particularly habitus) and on symbolic interactionism. In this approach, the flexibility of much of learning is emphasised and the interaction approach of people to learning and the ways in which their life trajectory is influenced by learning are also emphasised.

A difficulty with the idea of “learning careers” is its emphasis on the subjective. It specifically acknowledges the influence of Bourdieu on the development of the concept, and uses the conceptual tools of habitus and field. The argument is that as people move through life, internal and external influences can shape their habitus and influence their learning and their learning careers. Bourdieu, in developing his particular use of habitus, revamped the concept “to transcend the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism” (Wacquant, 2004a: 1), or as Bourdieu writes:

“I wanted to initially account for practice in its humblest forms-rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc-by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction “without an agent” and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximising its utility through rational computation”.

(Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:121)

Bloomer (1996, 1997, 2000) acknowledges the objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy (so central to Bourdieu) and argues that the habitus is a dialectical interplay of the objective and subjective. Although Bourdieu never argues that the individual is at the total mercy of his or her circumstances- there is an interaction of the personal which means that two people may react differently to the same situation. However, objective forces in society are a strong influence on the habitus. In any debate on learning, and certainly when Bourdieu’s ideas are used as a conceptual tool, the interplay of objective features must be considered as well as the subjective experience or, more accurately, the interplay of the two. On reading about learning careers I am left with the impression that the individual is an active participant in his or her responses to external factors.

In my reading of Bourdieu, I found him to be essentially deterministic in his thought and trapped in an objective point of view. Jenkins (1992) maintains that Bourdieu's model of practice is one of mindless conformity. This infers that people in disadvantaged positions have a habitus which has incorporated their position in society and that the lower social position, the lower their expectations will be. It has been argued that people can be, and are, trapped



in their class position and it was found that engagement in boxing did not facilitate development of cultural capital. But need this be the case? Can some of the skills be encapsulated and transferred?

To discuss transferability of boxing skills is to put oneself at risk of ridicule, yet while punches and defensive techniques may have little value outside the ring, the other boxing skills of commitment, knowledge of the body, quick thinking, ability to learn from others and control of emotions would seem to have value outside the immediate boxing situation. However, in my findings I could come up with no strong evidence that this was happening in practice, and it would seem that engagement in boxing does not encourage the individual to engage in formal learning. Boxing did increase participants' self confidence and networking opportunities, but there was not an explicit and conscious transfer of any of the skills learned in boxing.

Some of the respondents (particularly Dan and Al) did take the boxing skills and structure they had learnt with them into a structured programme of activity, to a large extent building their careers in the fitness industry around boxing techniques. It was the specific boxing skills of punching and developing technique which they utilised. This demonstrates the potential transferability of much of boxing.

If this is the case, then one can conclude that there is nothing to stop the schema becoming explicit, the individual skills being acknowledged and developed in a focused way and, perhaps, the achievement of individual skills being celebrated. Transferability of boxing skills could, therefore, be particularly encouraged. In both interviews and observations, whilst achievement was celebrated, there was no real acknowledgment of specific boxing skills outside punching and defensive techniques.

## **The Research Journey**

In this section I will present my personal reflections on the research process. For me the research and writing up of this study was a journey, which in many ways paralleled the journey of the young man or boy who engages in boxing. During the process of the research I built up a great deal of capital and developed many skills. I started the research process knowing very little about boxing and even less about the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. At the end of the journey I now know a great deal about boxing and have an appreciation of the theories of Bourdieu.

For me, I thought it essential to gain an understanding and appreciation through some sort of engagement with the sport; while I balked at full scale sparring I did want to participate in the training and learn something of the skills of "attack and defence" which are inherent in boxing. I engaged in some

light sparring and although was never hit in a serious sense I was smacked on the nose on occasions, albeit in a mild way, and the unpleasantness of this gave me some sense of what it is like for the boxer. Thus reinforcing the importance of my strategy, I am sure that I would not have gained this sense of what boxing was about had I carried out a less engaged study, a questionnaire or a series of qualitative interviews, for example.

I knew my experience could never mirror the experience of the working class lad who engages in the sport, but it did give me a strong appreciation and respect for boxing and the boxer. For example, on one occasion, I can recall sitting in my car in a state of apprehension before going to the gym, worried about what would happen. This process of engaging physically or bodily, Coffey (1999) refers to as the embodied self, a concept important in ethnography, and particularly if examining a sport. This participative strategy also, I think gained me acceptance by the boxers. Whilst, it was clear both by age and ability I would never be at all impressive, but it certainly gave me recognition and acceptance as one of the guys.

I arrived at the process of the research ignorant and apprehensive, Wacquant (1992) articulates the experience very well, he states that his personal journey started off with a horror of boxing and moved to a love of the sport. It was exactly this for me the more I discussed, observed, read and participated the more my respect grew for the skill and commitment necessary for boxing.

Parallel to this journey into boxing was my increasing understanding and appreciation of the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Similarly with these theories, I started with horror at their complexity and the inaccessibility of much of the language, I then moved to a vague sense of what the theories were about, then to an understanding and finally to making them part of my frame of reference.

In the initial stages of the research, the data collection and my sociological reading were almost separate activities, it was quite a challenge to try and relate the theory to the practical setting. An "ah ah" moment came when I read over one transcripts from the respondents whom I referred to as Ged. In the course of the interview I discussed with him the work of David Mathews (the journalist who trained as a boxer). Ged stated that he thought that it was impossible for Mathews to understand what it is like for the professional boxer, specifically the man who earns his living through boxing (see page 85). My interpretation or rephrasing of his idea was *that the habitus is different and therefore the engagement with the field will vary*. This insight made me stop and re-look at the data in light of Bourdieu's theories, from this point onwards the application of the sociological theories to boxing became extremely dynamic. This activity allowed me to appreciate the vision and depth of Bourdieu's ideas specifically his concern for the less advantaged in society.



I also reflected on my own education experience. As a schoolboy I recalled not the less advantaged position of girls at school but the rather disadvantaged position of the working class boys. In light of these reflections I found Bourdieu and Wacquant's statement, which I quoted on page 31, particularly relevant and powerful. It is part of my frame of reference and is therefore worth reproducing in this section:

The most personal is the most impersonal, that many of the most intimate dramas the deepest malaises, the most singular suffering that men and women can experience find their roots in the objective contradictions, constraints and double binds inscribed in the structure of the labour market, the school system and housing or in the mechanics of economics and social inheritance.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:201)

Like the boxer this process allowed me to build capital, I gained respect through my body capital, although people always qualified their admiration with the phrase "for a man of your age". The networking and the many contacts I made allowed me to develop my social capital. The qualification gained, certainly added to my cultural capital, and this is perhaps where I differed from the boxers. The main skills they gained did not lead them to formal education or really develop their cultural capital. This is the particular challenge I will take away from the research process; specifically, how to get people to develop and link these skills to formal learning.

### **A Consideration of the Research Questions**

The study was structured around certain research questions which are outlined in Chapter 1, page 11. It is useful to conclude by returning to these questions and outlining the way in which they were addressed.

*How does boxing develop body capital in relation to the development of cultural capital, or, are the skills involved in creating body capital transferable to other areas?*

Of central interest in the study were the ways in which an activity as physically focused as sport interplays with social issues. Whilst body capital is in its focus physical, it is the development of physical prowess and skills that enable the individual to make a financial profit from boxing. Learning to box is not an easy option, and in doing so a complex pattern of skills are built up and developed. Some skills clearly belong in the boxing ring, others such as commitment control of emotions could be applied to other areas, but there was no discussion, by the boxers, of transferability of these skills to other areas.

The supplementary objectives / research questions were addressed as follows:

- *An examination of the concept of “body capital” through a critique of Wacquant’s methods and findings*

An examination of body capital was considered in some detail in the literature review, the key findings were that boxers do indeed build up a degree of body capital; this body capital is often used by others in an exploitative way. This was a finding of the study that acceptance of risk was a pre-requisite for participation in professional and amateur boxing at the competition level.

- *To identify structural issues affecting boxing*

The findings of this study would suggest that while there are very clear physical issues around the development of body capital the social dimension are important and the following propositions are suggested:

- Boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas, it is thought to provide a framework and structure for the boys and young men participating and can prevent them getting into trouble.
- There is an increasing number of middle class people becoming involved in boxing, the so-called “white collar” boxers, this is quite a different experience from the working class involvement.

Middle class and working class experiences of boxing are different and the sport reinforces class position, it was suggested that the habitus is unchallenged. The motivation to box may be similar but the experience does little to alter class stance and position in society.

- *How does the development of the skills in boxing relate to the development of body capital?*

A schema is essential component of boxing. There are certain pre-requisites for the development of the schema, such as commitment, drive and sacrifice, through this physical fitness and skill are developed which is body capital. The use of the body capital by others was not as clear cut or obvious as it would seem but having developed these skills it would seem that a particular habitus was in which exploitation and risk taking is inevitable, is a pre-requisite for boxing.

- Exploitation and risk taking are an integral part of professional and amateur boxing (certainly at the competition level).



- *In what ways does body capital relate to/enhance other areas in the young men's lives?*

The important issue which emerged is, I think, that individuals come into the sport with a particular habitus this determines their engagement and remains unchanged and unaltered. This is illustrated by the following proposition:

- Boxing, therefore, requires a particular habitus, in which risk and exploitation are seen as inevitable. Whilst engagement in boxing does enhance the individual's life it does not lead to engagement in formal learning.

Whilst, engagement in boxing could lead to increased confidence, communication, my assumptions were the development of the level of skill in boxing should lead to involvement in some form of educational activity. This did not necessarily happen but it was found that:

- However, engagement in the sport (boxing) did build up reserves of social capital.

This social capital could be used to enhance and develop the lives of the participants. It would also seem that class perceptions and an increase in expectations is not a tremendous leap and making skills and their development and possible transferability explicit could do much to develop and enhance life opportunities.

The next section will consider the limitations and recommendations of the study.

### **Limitations and thoughts on development of the study**

Reflecting on the design and analysis of the study, it would seem that there are limitations which arise both from the methodology and in particular qualitative research and those which are inherent in the design of this particular study. The first issue that arose is I think the difficulty of generalising from the findings; the sample was small and highly focused and belonged to particular geographical region. All that can be stated is that the findings relate to this group and that they seem to reflect their position. A degree of generalisability can come from a consideration of the findings against the relevant theory and in particular the work of Waquant and Sugden. This is why I have organised the findings into propositions, to emphasise the tentative nature of these findings.

A second limitation, again inevitable in qualitative research, is the interaction of the researcher with participants and the data. I have considered in the

section on the methodology the impact of me, as the researcher on the data. Clearly, issues which I considered important may not be so to another researcher investigating a similar area. Also, certain gender and class biases are inevitable when one interacts in the field and in the analysis of the data. Things like assumptions which I share with participants and indeed my class definitions are inevitable. This is not to invalidate the research but it is important to ensure that the reader has this in mind as they read the report.

The study is qualitative in its design and it adopts ethnographic principles in its orientation. One approach could have been a highly focused ethnographic study exploring particular area in some detail, I had one primary setting, which I referred to as the "Fight Club" and also collected data from variety of settings, I triangulated the data with interviews. On reflection, I think the methodology was appropriate to address the concerns of the research but it is important to acknowledge that there are other approaches which have been usefully considered, specifically a focused ethnographic approach.

The people interviewed represented arrange of people involved in boxing, both in the fields of amateur and professional boxing. This allowed a range of views to be ascertained and a clear focus on the central issues. Again it is important to acknowledge that alternatives approach could have been taken. For example, an alternative approach could have been to focus on say, amateur boxing but the range of views would have been limited. The focus and range of the study is, therefore a limitation but had alternative approaches been taken, they too would have had limitations.

This chapter commenced with an outline of certain propositions which reflected the findings, the discussion contextualised them against the theoretical framework and, I think they represent an appropriate conclusion. They highlight areas for subsequent research which can be explored both qualitatively and through quantitative methods, which would enhance the generalisability of the findings.

The genesis of the study was a very broad concern with the lack of engagement of young men in formal education and a (vague) concern of how the ways in which engagement in sport could transfer into formal learning. I would conclude that an education programme which in some way could change or develop the habitus could enhance this transferability.

So, in conclusion the key propositions which arise from this study are:

- Boxing flourishes in economically deprived areas, it is thought to provide a framework and structure for the boys and young men participating and can prevent trouble.



- There is an increasing number of middle class people becoming involved in boxing, the so-called “white collar” boxers, this is quite a different experience from the working class involvement.
- A schema is essential an aspect of boxing, even in an activity as physically focused and specific as boxing societal views and issues can still influence this activity.
- Exploitation and risk taking intrinsic aspects of professional and amateur boxing (certainly at the competition level).
- Engagement in the sport (boxing) did build up reserves of social capital and through this economic capital.

The following has been added, which did not clearly emerge from the data but can be theorised.

- Boxing, therefore, requires a particular habitus, in which risk and exploitation are seen as inevitable. Whilst engagement in boxing does enhance the individual’s life it does not lead to engagement in formal learning.

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